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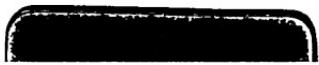
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DHERIS
OUR SINS
UP
TOR
OUR SAVIOUR



1



Our Sins,
or
Our Saviour.



Our Sins,
or
Our Saviour.

PARISH SERMONS.

BY THE REV.

SYDNEY WILLIAM SKEFFINGTON, M.A.,

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"Advent and Lent Thoughts," etc.*



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P R E F A C E .

THESE Sermons were not written for publication, but are selected from the MSS. prepared by the Author for his ordinary parish work, or for his ministerial teaching at the Charter House.

His former little volume, "The Sinless Sufferer," now in its Tenth edition, has evidently been much appreciated by English readers. Very many must have found, in those reverent and thoughtful pages, help and comfort for their souls, through the deeper insight granted them into the mysterious and awful sufferings of their Lord, and the clearer knowledge of that infinite Love, which constrains us, not only to kneel under His Cross, but also to walk humbly and thankfully on His narrow way.

It is hoped that the Sermons now published,—embracing, as they do, the whole course of that Christian Year which commemorates the various stages of the blessed Life of Jesus on the earth, and points Him out to us as God and Man,—may also be of use to those who are trying to obey His Voice, to follow His steps, and to rest on His Cross and Passion. God grant that they may be of service, as well, in deciding the eternal choice of those who halt as yet between two opinions, and who do not see that it is for their very life that they are called to cling to their Saviour rather than to their sins.

Owing to the Author's lamented illness, the revision of the book for the press has been intrusted to one who, though not personally acquainted with him, thinks it a real privilege to be allowed in some slight measure to further the work of a Christian priest, whose writings he knows to be full of faith and love, and whose meek, forgiving character, as described by an old Carthusian pupil, must have been trained under the guiding eye of his Redeemer.

May he, who has comforted others, receive all Divine consolations for himself!

G. E. J.

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SERMON I.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE

(SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT.)

S. LUKE XIII. 8, 9.

"And he answering said unto him, Lord let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well : and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

TO-DAY, my brethren, we reach the last Sunday of the present Christian Year. Although the full number of Sundays after Trinity has not run out, we are reminded by the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel of this day, that we are on the eve of another Advent, and that when on the next Lord's Day we assemble together in the house of prayer, a new year of grace will have dawned upon us. There is always something touching and solemnizing in coming to the close of any definitely marked period of time; even in natural things men pause and reflect for a moment as they pass over any of the great boundary-lines which measure out their existence—the close of the civil year, or the day



by which the year of their own life is reckoned, or the day which marks the conclusion of some special train of thought or action in which they have been engaged ; and so, too, the Christian who has followed the round of the Church's seasons since last Advent Sunday will find that a distinct chord of feeling within him is touched by the recurrence of this Sunday, which, by its familiar words, tells him that the Church has once more completed her annual course of doctrine and teaching, and that she is bidding him prepare himself again to follow his Divine Master from His Cradle to His Throne of Glory, with ever-deepening love, and ever-growing realization of the mysteries of the spiritual world. On such a day as this then we naturally look backward and forward ; we have followed step by step since the last Advent the wonderful process by which we have been brought near to God, and made capable of an eternity of bliss in His Presence.

Through the first division of the Christian Year we contemplated the Mysteries of the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection and Ascension, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and then having summed up all that had preceded in the Feast of the Holy Trinity we have been carried on quietly Sunday after Sunday, through the holy teaching of the after-Trinity Season, in which the great doc-

trines of the faith set before us in the former portion of the Christian Year have been applied to daily life and practice.

And now, brethren, standing as we do at the end of one year of grace, and looking onward to another, we may, I think, dwell for a few minutes with profit upon the teaching of that most gracious and yet most solemn parable of our Divine Lord's, from which I have taken my text. The parable itself has both a national and an individual application. Spoken by our Blessed Lord in the midst of His earthly ministry in the ears of the hard-hearted Jews, it bears within it the yet distant thunders of Divine wrath, while it points to the only possible means of averting the storm which was even now gathering in over the heads of the rejecting and rejected race. That we may fully see the scope of the parable it is necessary to examine the context in which it occurs. Our Lord had just been informed by some who were present of a horrid massacre perpetrated by Pilate on some Galileans, who it seems had been killed in the very act of sacrificing, and whose blood had mingled with that of the victims which they were offering. Our Lord anxious as ever to recall men's thoughts from curious speculations about the fate of others to concern for their own souls, warns them not to look upon these Galileans, or upon those eighteen who

had been lately crushed to death by the fall of a tower in Siloam, as sinners above all their neighbours because they had suffered such things. “I tell you, nay : but except ye repent, ye shall all “likewise perish.”

Yes, the days were fast approaching when Jerusalem should be circled round not with the Lord’s protecting arm, but with the armies of His avenging wrath, when the blood not of a few peasants of Galilee, but of the pride, the flower of the Jewish people should be shed like water through the streets of the holy city, when multitudes should be buried in death beneath the ruins of their temple and their capital, crying to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us.

Yet there was an undertone of mercy amid the threatenings of wrath ; there was still a door of escape opened, a cleft in the rock in which they might be hid. The fatal visitation was not yet determined beyond all hope of reversal. God’s chastisements no less than His promises are conditional ; there was still a glimpse of restoration opened out to them in the words, “Except ye “repent.” And the further to confirm this teaching our Lord utters the parable of our text—that song at once of mercy and of judgment—in the consideration of which we know not whether most to rejoice at God’s forbearance with the sinner, or to

tremble at the irreversible penalties which He inflicts on sin.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his "vineyard." In the great vineyard of the world the Eternal Father had planted the goodly tree of the Jewish Church : he had cast out the heathen, and planted it : it had taken root, and filled the land : fair and flourishing was that Church to all outward appearance, her show of leaves was goodly : amid the darkness of the outlying heathen she maintained the central light of Divine Revelation : her stately temple, her solemn ritual, her continual sacrifices pointed to Him who was to come : her teachers were ever occupied in reading and commenting on the great precepts of the Divine Law, in discussing and interpreting the prophecies which foreshadowed the glories of the Messiah's Kingdom: but all this fair outside was only a mockery, which concealed the real barrenness of the tree : "He "came and sought fruit thereon, and found none." This had been God's complaint of His people from the beginning ; this had been the sad record of their history all along. God had spoken unto them by His servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them : He had warned, He had expostulated, He had threatened, but in vain ; the curse of outward profession and inner unreality seemed to have eaten its way into the very heart of the nation,

until it culminated in the formalism and hypocrisy of the Pharisees of our Saviour's day. And now that the Eternal God, Incarnate upon earth, had come unto His own inheritance, seeking first the lost sheep of the house of Israel, might not the results of His mission, as a whole, be summed up in the same words? was not that typical action of His, as He walked from Bethany to the Holy City, on one of the mornings of His last week upon earth—that action which presented to the eyes the teaching that this parable conveyed to the ear—was not that the epitome, so to speak, of His three years' ministry of power and love?—“And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find anything thereon; and when He came to it He found nothing but leaves.”

And now the patience and long-suffering of God seem to be exhausted: the Father saith to the dresser of His vineyard—His Blessed Son, to whom all judgment has been committed—“Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” These *three* years—for under the Law of Moses, and again under the more spiritual teaching of the Prophets, and, lastly, by the Presence of the only-Begotten in their midst, full of grace and truth, Almighty God had sought with patient and unwearied love some practical result from the far-stretching

boughs and the goodly leaves of the Jewish polity—He had found, indeed, the tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, the broad phylacteries and the ostentatious prayers and alms—He had looked in vain for the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith—and now when it seems that vengeance may no longer tarry, when the guilt of ages has gathered itself into the appalling cry, “His blood ‘be on us, and on our children,’” and it would seem impossible that the sun which hid his face from the spectacle of Good Friday should rise again upon the city which had delivered up its God to be crucified—the voice of the Great Intercessor rises up as it were from the agonies of the Cross, and pleads for a further respite—“Lord, let it alone this year “also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if “it bear fruit, well : and if not, after that thou shalt “cut it down.” The wonders of the day of Pentecost—the spiritual energy of the Apostles’ preaching through the might of the Spirit, the proclamation of the great fact of the Resurrection, the spectacle of the faith and charity of the first Christians, the gradual spread of the religion of Jesus Christ, and its early successes, even in the strong-holds of heathenism—all these additional signs and wonders were yet to be granted to the unbelieving race. No less than thirty-seven years elapsed between the Crucifixion of our Lord, and the final destruction

of Jerusalem—years granted to the all-prevailing Intercession of Him who used them to utter His last pleading to the heart of His ancient people—and it was not until He had used in vain every means to win them to faith and repentance—until He might well take upon His lips the words He had uttered through His prophet of old, and say, “What could “have been done more to my vineyard that I have “not done in it?” that He summoned from a far country the ministers of wrath, and felled to the earth the tree at whose root the axe had lain so long.

But, my brethren, although this parable has a particular application to the case of the people in whose land it was delivered, it bears with no less force, by its general application and by the great laws of God’s dealing with mankind which it illustrates, upon the history and the destinies of the individual soul in all ages. The sin of man is ever alike in its deep-rooted depravity : the wrath of God is ever revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness ; and the One Mediator is for ever presenting Himself as an effectual Advocate with the Father for the conversion of sinners or the suspension of the punishment which they have so long merited. And let us notice in passing how the principle which pervades this parable—the idea of the deferring of God’s judgments, so as to leave men opportunity to turn—is one which runs through-

out all Scripture. One hundred and twenty years are fixed by Almighty God between the first beginnings of sensual degradation in the race of man and the deluge of waters which is to cleanse the pollution from the face of the earth: Abraham all but obtains a day of grace even for guilty Sodom: Moses pleads successfully for the rebellious and ungrateful people committed to his charge: Ahab's fasting and humiliation prolong his dynasty to the next generation: forty days of warning, and that not without effect, are granted to guilty Nineveh through the prophet Jonah: the captivity at Babylon is followed by the return to Jerusalem, and the restored national life: the threatened judgments which clouded the day of our Lord's Passion, by the year in which Jerusalem was filled with the Apostles' doctrine and heard continually the call to repentance; nay, may we not say with the Apostle, that the great day of doom—of which all lesser judgments are but the faint fore-runners—yet hangs suspended over a world which provokes God to His face continually, only by reason of the remarkable forbearance of Him, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance?

And as God deals with the vast and complicated system of the world, or with the nations which form a part of it, so does He deal with each single soul,

caring for it and disciplining it as though there were none other in the wide universe to attract His notice. And thus this great principle of God's government—by which He holds for a time in suspense the sword which is ready to fall upon the head of the guilty—finds its place in the history of each immortal being, as well as in the restless ebb and flow of national life. O could there be laid out before our eyes the secret and wonderful workings, the incessant and anxious care, of which the inner life of any one soul is the object, how should we be lost in amazement at the unmerited, the marvellously constant, love of God ! Who can speak as he should of the intricate, the minute ordering of the events of daily life, so disposed and governed that each may do its part in training us for our true rest ? Who can tell of the secret drawings of love, the hidden inspirations, the discipline of sorrow, the lessons of chastisement, which are brought to bear upon us one by one ? God speaks to us at one time amid the sweet breath of heavenly consolation, at another in the midst of the furnace of affliction : He multiplies around us the means of grace : He brings us within the influence of holy seasons, or places, or persons : He presents to us motives which are strong enough to overcome anything but the most hardened impenitence : He pursues us with the solicitations

of His love : He does everything but rob us of that prerogative without which man would cease to be man—the awful gift and responsibility of a free-will, that will whose power freely to choose its own highest happiness of necessity involves the alternative of rejecting it. And when apparently nothing more remains to be done, when even the energies of Divine Love seem to have exhausted themselves in vain upon the hardness of a heart which is resolutely bent upon sin, even in that supreme moment, that crisis of the soul's destinies, when the cry goes forth from the Eternal Justice—"Cut it down, why cum—"bereth it the ground?" there rises up from the depth of Divine compassion which dwells in the heart of the Redeemer, the pleading petition for a yet further extension of the day of grace—"Lord, let it "alone this year also." Some healing remedy may yet be found, some appeal may even yet obtain an entrance—the door before which the Lord has been so long standing and knocking in Divine patience and sorrow may even yet be opened to Him, that He may enter in and sup—the dresser of the vineyard will once more dig about the fruitless tree and dung it—and if it bear fruit—well. If it bear fruit—well : yes, my brethren, but there is an alternative, a possibility, terrible to dwell upon, but which yet forms an important part of the teaching of this parable, and one which we may not overlook.

“If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Yes, there arrives a moment hidden in the eternal councils of the Most High, at which even the voice of the Great Intercessor ceases to plead, and acquiesces in the righteous judgment of God. He whose body bears the prints of wounds received for sinners will Himself one day pronounce the irrevocable doom of sin. Our Saviour will become our Judge: He will recognize and execute the imperative claim of the Father’s justice.

And here it is that the parable, like the cloudy pillar on the shores of the Red Sea, while it gives light by night to the penitent and contrite souls of God’s people, is a cloud and darkness to those whose heart is hardened in obstinate sin. It tells us that the special danger of wilful sin—persevered in against warning voices within and without—is *this*—that we may, without being aware of it, pass by the day of grace, and weary out even the forbearance of a merciful Father, and the advocacy of a loving Saviour. Even now, in the prospect of another year of warnings and opportunities, there may be ascending up for some among us, who have long lived in neglect of vital religion, and who are ready to be snatched away in their sins—“Lord, let ‘it alone this year also.’” God grant that there may be none for whom that cry went up, and went up in vain, a year ago!

Brethren, the moment at which our individual probation ceases is a moment, which happily for us is hidden in the impenetrable darkness, which surrounds the secret things of the Lord our God. We cannot say at what exact period the call of the eleventh hour comes to each one among us—how often or how seldom a death-bed is the possible scene of a sincere repentance. And this, while on the one hand it seems to inspire us with hope, so on the other is a call to fear. For those who feel within themselves some desire to turn to God, or to do works meet for repentance, there is consolation in the thought that they have an Advocate with the Father, who is ready to plead even when the soul seems past recovery: but for those whose heart seems utterly dead and cold, even while they listen to the message of the Gospel, who are not even conscious of any wish to turn from what they know to be sinful, and to please God, there is great reason to fear lest they should have outlived the time allotted for their soul's trial. But for all alike the true and only safety lies in giving themselves without reserve to God while it is called to-day: you cannot be quite abandoned while you are clinging to your Saviour, and looking to Him to save you from your sins; and if you feel any real concern for your eternal safety, in that lies the surest evidence that your case is not yet hopeless.

Only let us remember that the test of a genuine repentance consists in bringing forth fruit to God : sorrow for sin becomes a mere sentiment when it does not lead us to forsake what God disapproves, to seek what He commands.

The lessons and the warnings of another Advent are close upon us : the goodness of God is yet leading us to repentance. May He in His mercy listen to the prayer which has gone up from so many hearts to-day, presented in the all-prevailing name of the great Intercessor for His vineyard on earth : may He so stir up all our wills that we plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works during the brief days of our earthly pilgrimage, may of Him be plenteously rewarded throughout the endless days of eternity.

SERMON II.

THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS.

(ADVENT; OR S. JOHN BAPTIST.)

S. JOHN I. 23.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Esaias."

SUCH, my brethren, is the account which the great Fore-runner gives of himself, the only testimony concerning himself which can be extracted from him by the Priests and Levites of Jerusalem.

The lonely youth passed far from home and friends in the wild desert was now over ; the days of his shewing unto Israel had come. He the Prophet Elect of God ages before his birth, the second Elias, stands upon the banks of Jordan, and prepares the way for his God.

Stern is his life, and stern his message ; the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and men must repent of their sins, if they are to be admitted into

it. His words are few and simple, but they touch the hearts and consciences of those who hear them. Many must have been living of those dwellers in the hill country who thirty years ago had heard the marvels which gathered round his birth, and who had exclaimed as they heard them, “What manner “of child shall this be?” And now it is noised abroad that the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth is come forth from his desert home, and is calling upon all men to repent—that on the banks of the Jordan is to be seen a strange and lonely figure, clad like the Prophet Elijah of old, in a rough garment of camel’s hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins, whose only food is that afforded by the wilderness around—locusts and wild honey. The strange stories of his birth, his hard and ascetic life, his fame for sanctity, the power of his words, attract multitudes into the wilderness, the world rushes, as the world often will rush, to hear its own vices rebuked. Jerusalem pours forth its wonder-loving or truth-seeking crowds, Pharisees and Sadducees stand side by side on the river bank, the towns and villages of Judæa contribute their populations to the multitude, and the dwellers around the far-distant reaches of Jordan descend to view the new Prophet of the Highest. But there were many who did more than hear: their consciences were touched by the words of the new preacher of

repentance ; he has called their sins to remembrance ; and the Baptist pours over their heads the waters of Jordan as a visible symbol of the purification of heart and life which they are henceforth to profess ; the fear of God's judgments, and the hope of a better and higher life in the new Kingdom of Heaven, prevail over the mere sense of shame, and they confess one by one the guilty catalogue of the sins of their past life. But as the excitement gathers, and expectation is roused to its highest point, as men are beginning to ask themselves whether this may not possibly be He, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write, the great Deliverer of His people Israel—a deputation from the chief Jews of Jerusalem arrives upon the scene. They are Priests and Levites—men continually occupied in the service of God—they are sent by the highest authorities of the Jewish nation. The members of the chief Jewish Council—the Sanhedrim—had been stirred by the tidings which reached them of the Baptist's preaching and success ; they were roused for a moment from their heartless formalism and self-righteous superciliousness, in which for the most part they seem to have been buried ; they are excited and anxious, perhaps jealous for their own authority and influence, apprehensive of innovation ; they ask from the lips of the new teacher an answer concerning himself, “Who art thou ?” It

was a critical moment in the life of the Baptist; rumours were already rife that the long-expected Messiah was even now among them; disciples were, doubtless, prepared to embrace Him; would the lips of the great Preacher confirm them? Whether some Satanic temptation presented itself to the holy Baptist to proclaim himself a false Christ we know not: at any rate S. John records his answer in words of singular emphasis—an answer made to the thoughts rather than to the words of his questioners—"He confessed, and denied not, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." Again they question him. "What then? Art thou Elias?" His very appearance may have reminded them of the stern prophet of old, and, as we know from a passage in the Gospels, the Levites taught that the appearance of Elias must precede the advent of the Messiah. But S. John the Baptist, although sent before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elias, was not Elias in person. "He saith, I am not." "Art thou, "then," they ask, "that Prophet," meaning the Prophet predicted of old by Moses, to be raised up from the midst of his brethren like unto the great Law-giver himself? S. John once more disclaims the suggestion: he answered, "No." But an answer of some kind must be returned, and the Baptist has hitherto contented himself with negatives. "Then said they unto him, Who art thou,

“that we may give an answer to them that sent us ? “what sayest thou of thyself?” Thus directly appealed to, the Baptist states his mission and office in language not his own, but which had been used concerning him ages ago by the great Evangelical Prophet. “He said, I am the voice of one crying “in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the “Lord, as said the Prophet Esaias.” He is still anxious to hide, to put as far as possible out of sight, his own personality. He is but a voice—a God-inspired voice—a mere organ which God employs to convey to the hearts of His people a message from Heaven, “Make straight the way of “the Lord.”

And how, my brethren, did the Baptist fulfil his Mission? how did he teach his hearers to make the way of the Lord straight? What was the sum and substance of his preaching in the wilderness of Judæa?

He did two things. Firstly, he called upon men to repent; secondly, he proclaimed to them that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. His whole preaching is so summed up by the Evangelist, “Repent ye ; for the Kingdom of Heaven is at “hand.”

“ Repent ye.” Yes, that was the first thing—the nation must be roused from the deadly sleep of sin, the Pharisees and Sadducees from their pride and

self-righteousness, the people from their selfishness and hardness of heart, the publicans and sinners from grosser forms of evil.

But to all alike there is one message from Heaven—Repent. The Saviour was coming among them ; already was He on his way from His village home of Nazareth, coming forth from that hidden life of obedience and poverty which He had lived for the last thirty years ; He was to be going in and coming out among them for the space of three years ; but in order to receive Him aright, they must repent. A spiritual process must take place in the hearts of the people, which the prophets of old had by an instructive metaphor compared to a vast engineering operation—the preparation in the desert of a highway to be trodden by God Himself ; the valleys must be filled—those great voids and depressions in the heart of man left by the wear and tear of sinful passions ; the mountains and hills of pride and self-satisfaction must be brought low ; the crooked ways of deceit and hypocrisy must be made straight ; the rough ways of hatred and anger and harshness must be made smooth ; and then should all flesh see the salvation of God. Thus was the way of the Lord to be prepared by His messenger—thus was a people to be made ready for their God.

And then there was that other great message

from Heaven, breaking in like a fair morning upon a dark and storm-tossed night—"The Kingdom of "Heaven is at hand." The doubts and perplexities of the intellect, the struggles and wrestlings of the heart, the sense of ineffectual efforts and baffled longings—these were to be done away for ever, because the darkness was already passing, and the true light breaking in upon the world. Through the tender mercy of our God the Day-spring from on high had visited men to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace. Already there stood One among them, whom they knew not; already the form of One fairer than the children of men was in the midst of them, ready to proclaim to them the truth of God, to point out to them the way of life. The kingdom of Heaven was at hand; the reign of peace, of righteousness, of truth, had already begun; a new and fairer day had dawned upon the world's history: henceforth peace and joy, albeit amid clouds and crosses, were made possible for men: there was a treasure hid in the field of life, which it was at least possible to find, a pearl of great price accessible to earnest seekers, to buy which a man might well be content to sell all that he had. Thus in the Baptist's cry there was a song at once of mercy and of judgment: fear was mingled with hope, the call to repentance with the announcement

of deliverance from sin's bondage. The Repentance to which he called men was to be no barren, hopeless, weary task : it was but a brief discipline, to be followed by life, and light, and peace—the Fast which should usher in the everlasting Festival of the Gospel.

Brethren, the Mission of S. John Baptist to his generation is past and over—the voice which sounded on the banks of Jordan has long since been silenced by the sword of the executioner. But his words still echo on through the long ages of the Church, and are borne home by the Spirit to the hearts and consciences of multitudes of the children of men. The Mission of the Baptist is perpetually renewed in the persons of the ministers and stewards of God's mysteries, who have received a solemn charge to prepare and make ready the way of the Lord by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. “The Lord is at hand.” That same Jesus, who came once to visit us in great humility, is about to appear once more on this our earth, with power and great glory: He who once came to be our Redeemer comes again to be our Judge. And as He sent S. John Baptist before His Face to prepare the way for His first Advent, so does He now send forth His ordained ministers to make ready a people acceptable in His sight when He shall be revealed at the great day of Judgment.

That work of preparation has been going on from the day of Pentecost to this very hour : in no age or generation of the Church has God left Himself without witness : the Divine Voice has ever sounded in the ears of men, whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear : the men, and women, and children who have lived and died before we were born, of whom we know nothing but their names as we read them on the tombstones of our quiet church-yards, have heard, either to their salvation or their condemnation, the call to repentance: they have had their day of grace, their opportunity of seeking the Lord while He might be found : they have made their choice—their now irrevocable choice—that choice the fruits of which they must now reap to all eternity.

And in your ears, my brethren, that same Voice is now sounding in the closing hours of the Advent Season,—ere another year sweeps onward to its close, and another Christmas passes over our heads. You are called upon to prepare to meet your God—to trim your lamps, ere the heavenly Bridegroom appear. And the call is in substance the same to all in all ages, “Repent ye.” Yes, before we can be ready to see the Face of our God, we must *repent*—we must make us a new heart, and a new spirit. Do not, my brethren, let us deceive ourselves in this matter, do not let us shut our eyes to facts.

Conceal it as you will, bury it out of sight and out of mind as much as you may, endeavour to be blind to its consequences, yet the fact remains after all—the great fact of human *sin*.

There is in you, and in me, in every man, woman, or child in this Church, something, call it what you will, which is opposed to and contrary to the will of God—something which fights and struggles against His will, something which, if it is not uprooted and torn out of our heart, will grow up in rank luxuriance, and choke every holy thought or good desire which we ever had, something which answers to the tempting voice of the devil without, something which is sufficient to bear us down to everlasting punishment. Some of you, doubtless, are struggling and fighting through God's grace against this evil within you, now with greater, now with less success, often baffled and defeated, yet never quite giving over the ceaseless contest : but I may be speaking to some who allow sin to have its own way in their heart, who are giving themselves up without compunction to their favourite indulgence, whatever it may be, who are systematically neglecting duties to which they know God calls them, who are determined, in short, to work their own will, and to do their own pleasure, in spite of all the warnings of God's word and God's ministers, against all the checks which conscience

is ever putting in their way. *I* indeed cannot read your hearts, I cannot say what is the accursed thing which is there lying hid, and which is eating away all spiritual life ; in some cases it may be some wilful, presumptuous sin, some one giant form of evil, which spreads its shade over their whole being ; in others, a variety of lesser sins, each small in itself, but which taken together undermine the whole fabric of the soul's life, and form a thick veil of separation between the man and his God. Your own conscience will tell each one of you, my brethren, what that is in him which he is afraid to take with him into God's presence, what that is in him which he would wish away did he know that he should be summoned out of the world this night. But whatever that one thing may be, you must, cost what it may, give it up at once and for ever if you are to be saved. Do not, I beseech you, deceive yourselves with empty words and vague expressions about human infirmity and God's mercy. The holiest of men will have need enough in that day of unspeakable judgments, to plead both of these against the severity of God's justice ; when you have done your utmost you will still have need to cry, "If "Thou shouldest be extreme to mark what is done "amiss, O Lord, who may abide it ?" But until your regenerate will has made a resolute, it may be almost a desperate effort, to cast away all known

and wilful sin, to give up that which God hates, and to embrace that which He loves—such a plea is simple hypocrisy. “Think not even to say within “yourselves, We have” God “to our Father,” unless you “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” If there is sin—I am speaking of course of known and deliberate sin—repentance is the road, and the only road, which can conduct us into the Kingdom of God—not the mere *expression* of penitence, not the mere cry, “I am sorry,”—“I am a miserable sinner,” but the convulsive effort, as of a drowning man in his last agony, to lay hold of the rope thrown out to us, to be delivered from the seething mass of waters which are ready to close for ever over our head. These, my brethren, believe me, are not mere words, they are not the mere conventional utterances of the pulpit, they set before you stern and terrible realities—realities which will abide when all that now surrounds you, your homes, your friends, your present occupations, will have passed away from you for ever. There is, your own hearts know it, brethren, there is such a thing as *sin*, and so long as God is God sin must incur His hatred, His condemnation. You cannot be one with God, so long as you are clinging to that which God by the very necessity of His nature regards with hatred. Repentance may be sharp, may be painful to you : to give up a favourite sin may be like the

plucking out of the eye, the cutting off of the right hand, but it is the only road which will lead into the Kingdom of God : it is the very foundation of new spiritual life—the only way of peace and liberty. Resolve then, I beseech you, ere another Advent season has passed for ever away, as pass away it will in a few hours, to give yourselves unreservedly to God : whatever your past may have been, however guilty, however self-willed, lay it all open before God, hide nothing from Him : ask Him to make you a clean heart, to renew a right spirit within you, to give you the will and the power to repent in earnest. Only when you are at peace with Him, can you be at peace with yourselves or your fellow-men : to be separated from Him is disquiet and unrest even in this world, it is woe unspeakable in the next. Time is hurrying on, the night of the world is far spent, and the Eternal Day is at hand : and even though the coming of the Lord should be delayed for thousands of years, it is absolutely certain that in a few short years (they appear perhaps long to you now, but oh how short will they appear as you look back upon them) you will reach that supreme and awful crisis of your whole existence—the hour of death.

But you will, perhaps, be inclined to say, my brethren, that these are mere words, words which you have heard in one form or another time after

time, words to which you find it difficult to attach any very definite meaning. These words—sin, repentance, renewal of heart, judgment—what have they to do with the quiet, uneventful lives which you are living? how are you to set about the work to which Advent calls you? how are you to turn to God, to make yourselves ready for His appearing? In plain language you ask, What is it to which you are calling us, what does it all mean, what shall we *do* then? Now this is precisely the question which the preaching of S. John Baptist called forth from the people to whom he spoke. Once roused and thoroughly in earnest, they were anxious to enter on the way of life, to do what God would have them do. And notice how thoroughly practical, how simple and plain is the advice of the Baptist, how entirely it adapted itself to the peculiar wants and circumstances of his hearers—he does not bid them, as they might have expected, do some great thing, enter upon some costly and difficult work of expiation, leave their daily work, give up home and friends, and take up their abode with him in the wilderness; the fruits of repentance which he would have them bring forth are those which spring naturally from the lot in which God's Providence has placed them—charity, faithful discharge of daily duties, the avoidance of the special temptations of one's earthly calling, contentment. “When

“the people asked him, What shall we do then? “he answereth, and saith unto them, He that hath “two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, “and he that hath meat let him do likewise. There “came also publicans to be baptised, and said unto “him, Master, what shall we do? And he said “unto them, Exact no more than that which is “appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded “of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he “said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither “accuse any falsely, and be content with your “wages.” And what does this teach us but the great, the never-to-be-forgotten truth that the road to heaven rises from the threshold of our own homes, and our ordinary occupations? We are apt to think that because sin, and death, and judgment, and heaven or hell, are great and exciting thoughts, they must, if vividly realised, necessarily lead to a fevered and excited course of action. Not so, my brethren. Wonderful are the mysteries which surround our present existence, unspeakably important are the issues which hang upon these few years of life through which we are so rapidly passing. There is a bliss before us in comparison of which earth’s brightest hours are wretchedness, there is an unending woe for which we would gladly exchange life’s seasons of deepest dejection. Yet there is no call upon us (at least after the tumultuous feelings

which cannot but accompany a first turning to God have subsided) for vehemence, or many words, or great excitement. The path of penitence, the way of life, lies in the punctual and honest discharge of the duties of that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you, in the self-denying deed of charity, the kindly word, the helping hand, the ever-ready thought for others' interests and others' wants, the patient submission to God's will in crosses and difficulties, the cheerful, brave, contented, trustful heart. Begin with what you know to be right, and God will lead you on as you are able to bear it : these things may seem to be small in themselves, petty duties, trifling self-denials, slight tests of patience, but you will find them quite enough to exercise your powers of faith and endurance—they may appear at times dull, uninteresting, prosaic, but, brethren, nothing is really small, nothing trifling which brings us into contact with God and the unseen world, and which helps or hinders us in gaining or losing what is in reality our all. Has God given you even the faintest wish to serve Him, to repent of your past life, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance ? Then delay not, I beseech you, to act at once upon His gracious, His secret inspirations. Much may depend, nay everything may depend upon the purposes, the resolutions, the prayers of a few hours. You are, it may be,

travelling along the broad road which leads to destruction : to-night you come upon a turning which will lead you back into the narrow way : it may be the last you will pass ere you reach your journey's end. What would you one day give to be able to strike into it ?

And, brethren, in another sense, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand ;" you will soon be listening once more to the old familiar strains, which proclaim, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, "good-will towards men." From the cradle of Bethlehem there streams a light over the whole earth throughout all generations ; the Infant who lies there is your God, who has thus humbled Himself for the love of you : will a God of such infinite compassion, think you, reject the greatest sinner, who throws himself in faith and penitence at His feet ?

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SERMON III.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN.

(ADVENT.)

S. LUKE xxi. 27.

"And then shall they see the Son of Man, coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

THE season of Advent, through which we are now passing, is one of those precious seed-times of grace which abound in the Church of Christ. Many and varied are the means which God uses to awaken His people out of that spiritual languor and slothfulness into which even the holiest are ever liable to fall back, or to rouse the sleeper from his deadly slumber ; and among these we may well reckon the recurrence of seasons like the present, in which some great portion of divine truth and practice is urged upon us by every possible means, by the services of the sanctuary, by the words of Holy Scripture, by the exhortations of God's ministers. Truths which are supposed to be the subject of meditation at every time are only too apt to be

considered at no time, and hence it is the wisdom of the Church to select certain seasons for the special commemoration of certain great verities of our Christian Faith, that they may become to us no longer a form of words, but may be endued with a living reality, and produce a direct and practical result upon our life and character. Thus it is that God is ever stirring up our minds by way of remembrance, presenting us with new motives, offering us opportunities of making a fresh beginning. May He, through whose mercy we have been spared to see this Advent season, vouchsafe to bless it to His glory and our souls' good !

Advent, as you know, is a season which embraces a two-fold significance. On the one hand it looks back to the past, and speaks to us of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. It is the herald of the great Festival of the Incarnation of the Son of God, which we are so soon to celebrate ; it attunes our mind to bear our part in the mid-night carol of the angels ; it prepares us to offer our adoration at the Cradle of the Infant King. But it bears within it another thought than this, it carries on our mind to another coming of the Lord, a day yet future, on which that same Jesus, who came once to visit us in great humility, will return in all the power

and glory which were so completely shrouded at Bethlehem—when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. Advent is the only season, in which this great mystery of our holy religion is prominently placed before us: it is the season at which especially our faith becomes the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For when, Sunday after Sunday, or day after day, we recite the Creed of the Catholic Church, there arrives a point in it at which we pass by one bound from a scene which took place more than eighteen centuries ago, upon the mount of Olives, to the profession of our belief in the coming of a day which is yet hidden in the inscrutable counsels of God. “He ascended into “heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the “Father. And He shall come again with glory to “judge both the quick and the dead, whose king-“dom shall have no end.” Our faith passes from the past to the future; it bridges over the long ages which are even now rolling along with turbid flood, and binds us fast to the eternal shore, and the great consummation of all things. And hence it is perhaps among other reasons that a serious belief in our Lord’s return to judgment lays a peculiar contribution upon our faith: the events of our Lord’s earthly life (though abiding and fruitful in

their results) are in one sense past and gone, they are matters of history, partially acknowledged even by those who are strangers to their living power; but the second Advent is a truth which, if accepted in good earnest, brings with it a vivid realization of our Saviour's abiding life, involves a series of practical consequences, and colours our view of life and its concerns by a necessity from which we cannot escape. Christianity is as a great drama in which the last scene has yet to be enacted; it is a building on which the head-stone has yet to be placed; the plant which has grown from the seed cast into the ground, the Saviour dying for our sins, has yet to blossom into perfect flower. God's purposes have yet to be unfolded one by one until they attain in heaven their full realization. We are standing between the past and the future, between the past of Christianity, mighty in its world-subduing influence, and its individual deeds of heroic faith and hope and charity, and that future of which its successes on earth are but the nascent and struggling infancy. Christians have, of all men, the most right to be joyous and hopeful, for their golden age is placed not in the dim region of an uncertain antiquity, but in the ever-nearing prospect of the personal return of their Lord and Saviour, and the glories of the unending kingdom on which He shall then enter. "We believe that

“Thou shalt come to be our Judge”—that has been the cry of the Church from generation to generation ; that has been the faith in which our fore-fathers have lived and died, that is the crown and goal of the longings of all faithful hearts, the one full and sufficient resolution of all the mysteries which encompass and shadow our present existence, the sun-set glory which is to fall upon the evening of the world’s life.

And, my brethren, notice that it is as a fact that it is set before us in the Church’s Creed ; it takes its place and is ranked side by side with the simple historical statements that our Lord was born of the Blessed Virgin, and suffered under Pontius Pilate ; it is presented to us simply as the termination of a catalogue of events in His life. Yes, blessed be God, we are taught to look for nothing less than the actual re-appearance of Him, who was born in Bethlehem, who suffered on Calvary, and who vanished from human sight on the Mount of Olives, that same Blessed Saviour, who lives for ever with human body and human soul, who in the days of His earthly humiliation was so full of tenderness and pity to our frail humanity, whose heart was overflowing with love, whose eyes were ever beaming with compassion, whose hands and feet and side still bear the print of the nails, the mark of the soldier’s spear. Amid all the splendours and the

terrors of that day, it is to one Form that Holy Scripture principally draws our attention ; He is the sum and centre of that vast and awful gathering of heaven and earth, of men and angels ; He is the one supreme object of attraction and repulsion, whose Presence forms the joy of the righteous and the terror of the ungodly ; it is upon His Face that the regards of all creation will be fixed. The signs in the heaven above, the roaring of the sea and waves, the distress of nations, these are but the birth-pangs which precede His revelation, the heralds which usher His approach. “ And then shall they “ see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power “ and great glory.” Oh ! what will be to each one of us the first sight of Him, who has occupied so much of our thoughts on earth, the actual countenance and form of our Incarnate Lord ! how will our eyes at once single out, amid the hosts of angels and saints, the God-man, chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely ! how will it be possible for us to endure the thought that He has suffered so much for us, and we have loved Him so little ? how will our hearts tremble and yet long for one glance from His gracious and majestic countenance !

But you will say, brethren, the Lord delayeth His Coming ; multitudes have lived and suffered and died ; change after change has swept over the earth, and yet He keeps still silence. And then,

perhaps, the scientific spirit of these days will suggest to you some thoughts about the undeviating course of nature, and the uniformity of her laws, and you will urge that it is hard for you to realize such a violent interruption of the great frame-work of the universe by which you are surrounded—that it is difficult to live in the anticipation of the Lord's return to judgment. Yes, brethren, but this is precisely the test of the reality of our faith, and without faith it is impossible for you to please God. These objections which occur to your mind were prophesied by S. Peter as the very token of the approaching end. "There shall come," he tells us, "in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of 'His Coming ? for since the fathers fell asleep, all "things continue as they were from the beginning "of the creation.'"

We know not, indeed, we dare not indulge in idle conjecture as to the day or the hour of the Lord's Coming ; but one thing at least we know, that each year which passes over our heads brings that day nearer to us, that it may be that before we reach another Advent the fires of judgment will be gleaming around us, and the form of the Son of Man be displayed in the heavens above. And, again, our Lord in Holy Scripture specially insists upon the suddenness and unexpected character

of His Own Coming. He comes as a thief breaks into a house, in the still watches of the night—as a master who returns unexpectedly from a distant journey—as the flood upon the generation of Noah—as the fires from heaven upon the guilty Sodom. We must not expect any unmistakeable and conclusive intimation of His approach; He may come at any moment: and it may be that the time at which we are least expecting Him will be the very time of His visitation. And hence it becomes at once our duty and our privilege to live in the constant anticipation of His re-appearing, and to make it the subject of our prayers and thoughts. This is His own command, for the injunction to watch which He gave first to His disciples He specially extended to all future ages in the words, “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.” It is to be feared that the thought of the Second Advent falls too much into the background in the spiritual life of most among us, that our faith is so feeble or our love so cold, that we almost shut out from our hearts that possibility which is always hanging over us, the end of the world and the visible manifestation of the Son of man. The lapse of ages which seems to hinder our vivid anticipation of it does in reality but make it more probable.

The early Christians, as you know, were possessed with an ever-present consciousness of the possibility

of the Lord's Coming in their time ; to them the day of Christ was always at hand. And though the event proved that they were mistaken in this, and that the Bridegroom would tarry through the slumbering ages of the Church, yet think you that such a belief contributed nothing to their diligence and faithfulness, did it not prepare them for that hour of death, and often of martyrdom, which was for each one individually the Coming of the Lord's Kingdom ? We are not indeed required to entertain a conviction that the Lord will certainly return in our own day ; that were to ground our spiritual life upon what may turn out to be an error : but it is to be questioned whether we do not practically lose a strong motive for Christian holiness, a powerful incentive to greater zeal and love, by allowing the Second Advent to occupy so inconsiderable a place in our thoughts and affections, by so seldom turning with earnest longing towards that supreme moment on which hangs our hope for eternity, and exclaiming in answer to that solemn announcement which forms the concluding message of God in His Holy Word, " Surely I come quickly—
"Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Here is an event of unparalleled, of unspeakable importance not only to ourselves, but to the whole race of which we form a part ; an event which utterly annihilates the mightiest revolutions of earth,

an event too which is ready to burst upon us at any moment—and is it possible that we who profess to believe in its approach, and pray for its consummation, can remain indifferent or careless about it, can practically exclude it from the range of our serious anticipations and wishes? At any rate during this Advent Season let us resolve, by God's grace, to give it a place in our meditations, and endeavour to bring it home to our hearts; let us not allow to remain wholly barren and inoperative a doctrine of our Faith, which may not only serve to gild the future, but to direct and discipline our present habits of thought and action.

Let me, in conclusion, remind you of some of the practical results and benefits which may flow from a quickened apprehension of the great fact of our Blessed Lord's personal return to Judgment.

And first, in the sphere of intellectual life it is a fact which has a special value in relation to present modes of thought.

The vast and varied victories which have been attained by the mind of man within the present century over the physical universe, the discovery of the laws of nature and their practical application to the conveniences and luxuries of daily life, have tended to produce a habit of thought, in which the present constitution of things is more or less looked upon as final, and a satisfaction is felt

in the anticipation not of "the new heaven and the "new earth," but of a more perfect knowledge of the vast universe by which we are now surrounded, and a still greater power of adapting the knowledge thus obtained to the material well-being of mankind. Progress has become more or less identified with the advance of science, and the advance of science with the multiplication of the refinements of civilization. It would be far from my intention to undervalue inventions which add greatly to the prosperity of our race, still less to check the employment of our mental powers upon the wonderful creations of God : but it cannot be, I think, denied that unless sanctified by the grace of God such pursuits have a tendency to produce an over-satisfaction in objects of sense and time, a disposition to rest in the world as we find it, and to make material progress the standard of true advance. Surely among other blessings which a firmer grasp of the Second Advent might bring with it, not the least is to be reckoned an effectual antidote to such a tone of mind as this. For in proclaiming to you the Second Advent, God proclaims to you a moment at which the earth and the works that are therein, all the triumphs of man's skill and art, shall be burned up—a moment at which man will be judged not by the stores of intellectual knowledge which he has acquired, but by his approxi-

mation towards moral and spiritual perfection.

But this doctrine, fruitful in the domain of the intellect, will be found also to have its special bearing upon our deeper and spiritual life : it will help us in our efforts after individual sanctification. For who that is endeavouring to live to God does not find that among the other obstacles by which he is sore let and hindered in running the race set before him, this holds no inconsiderable place, namely, that the constant pressure, from every side, of things seen and felt weighs down his mounting spirit, and passes like a thick cloud between his vision and the glories of the heavenly sunshine? The uniform course of daily life, the recurrence of familiar scenes and seasons, the constant sight of well-known faces, the ever-present occupations and duties which surround us—, these things in themselves tend to deaden the soul's perception of the spiritual and unseen world, to produce an atmosphere, so to speak, merely natural, and to exclude any thoughts of the mysterious and supernatural order, which envelopes on every side the prosaic details of life. Hence it is that those who make no effort of faith are easily carried down the stream of every-day business or pleasure ; they find the life of their hand, enough to satisfy and occupy the mind for the present, and they therefore imagine that to-morrow shall be as to-day ; they seldom or never

ask themselves the question—Whither is my existence with all its concerns tending? what is the aim and issue of my life as a whole?

And even those, my brethren, who strive to live above the world, and to place themselves in the Presence of Him who is invisible to eyes of sense, feel more or less at times the influence of the same causes, though in their case they do but by their stormy gusts make the lamp of spiritual vitality to flicker, and cannot extinguish it altogether.

To meet this evil God sends us various remedies. Our life is apt to be broken in upon by great events; its calm and even tenour is at certain epochs instantly changed. We are perhaps brought face to face with death, either in our own person or that of those dear to us as our own life, or our lot undergoes some unexpected reverse, we pass under new conditions: there is a breaking-up of old associations, a sudden turn made in the road of life. The scenes, the faces, by which we have been so long surrounded, we see them again no more for ever. Such seasons as these throw us back upon ourselves, and thought of self brings with it the thought of God, and the unseen world, and the strange future into which we are hastening. Such seasons often, by the grace of God, are the beginning of a spiritual life to some, the deepening and quickening of it to others. But

what are all these, my brethren, but earthly types of that one great change, which is soon to transfigure not only our own life, but the wonderful and complex system of which we now form a part. “The time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.” Yet let us once fairly lay hold of the truth that the Judge standeth at the door, that at any moment He may be revealed to the wondering gaze of the careless populations of the earth, as they buy and sell, marry and are given in marriage—once let us feel that our Saviour is not merely One who lived and died for us ages ago, but One who is at this very moment living for us, thinking of us, feeling for us, at God’s right hand, and is only waiting a brief season ere He manifests Himself to us, face to face, from behind the thin veil, which hides Him from our view; let us once make this truth our own, and we rise into a region, where the excitement and eagerness of the world seem to be a kind of unreality, where its occupations and its amusements cease to divert us from the thought of that which will so soon be all-important to us, and men who are living on in

sin seem to us as those who are laughing and jesting over a mine which is ready at any moment to explode beneath their feet. Then we learn to live not in the sight and enjoyment of things seen, which shall presently disappear altogether, but in the faith of those unseen things, in the midst of which we shall soon find ourselves.

And lastly, brethren, let me remind you of the duty of praying for the speedy approach of that great Day. In some manner unknown to us, the time of the Advent of our Lord depends upon the prayers of His people. S. Peter tells us that it is possible for us not only to look forward to, but actually to hasten, the Day of God. Yes, to poor mortals like ourselves is it permitted, by God's unspeakable dispensations, to influence the counsels of heaven. "Thy kingdom come ;" these are words which are often on our lips ; may this Advent find them in our hearts ! Those only need fear to pray for the Second Advent who feel that it can bring with it, if it should now come, only their condemnation ; but if these dare not now pray for its approach, what a call is this to them quickly to make themselves ready, ere the mid-night cry is heard, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh !" For though that day dawn amid the ruins of a perishing world and the wild alarm of the impenitent, yet will it bring with it no terrors to those who on

earth have sought the Face of the Son of Man ; amid the crash of falling empires, and the manifestation of God's glories and judgments to a trembling universe, they will be up-borne by the everlasting Arms, they will be upheld by the Hand of God Himself, they will find a hiding place and a shelter from the wrath to come in the pierced Rock of Ages, they will find themselves received at last, after their long and tempest-tost passage, into the eternal Haven, where they would be.

SERMON IV.

OUR SINS, OR OUR SAVIOUR.

(THE CIRCUMCISION.)

S. MATTHEW i. 21.

"Thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins."

ON the eighth day after His Nativity our Blessed Lord was circumcised. It was on this occasion that, in accordance with Jewish custom, He received His Name—the Name by which henceforth He was to be known among men, the Name which was one day to be fixed over His Sacred Head upon the Cross, the Name which throughout all ages receives the loving homage of angels and saints, the Name at which devils tremble, and which wicked men blaspheme.

You cannot fail in reading Holy Scripture to be struck by the remarkable emphasis which is laid upon the human Name of our Divine Lord. In the Old Testament we have a special type of our Lord bearing His very name in its Hebrew form—

Joshua—the leader of the chosen people into the promised inheritance: a command was given from Heaven both to the Blessed Virgin and to Joseph to give this Name to the Holy Child, even before His birth: and accordingly, as we read in S. Luke's gospel, "when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His Name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." It is the Name by which our Lord was known alike to friends and foes during His earthly ministry—but it is not until after His Ascension that the special honour, which was to be paid to His sacred Name, is fully brought out: in the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the power and efficacy of His sacred Name are repeatedly dwelt upon—it is the Name in which the Apostles go forth to conquer the world. S. Peter declares that it is His Name, through faith in His Name, which gave strength to the cripple at the Beautiful gate of the Temple: and when questioned before the Sanhedrim as to this matter, he declares that there is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The Apostles are commanded not to teach nor to preach at all in the Name of Jesus. They pray that signs and wonders may be done by the name of the Holy Child, Jesus. S. Peter, preaching to Cornelius and his

company, declares that to Him give all the Prophets witness that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. The Name of the Lord Jesus seems to have been specially efficacious in the casting forth of evil spirits : S. Paul commands the spirit of divination, which possessed the damsel at Philippi, to come forth in the name of Jesus Christ, and we read of certain vagabond Jews, exorcists, who took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the Name of the Lord Jesus. So also in the Epistles, the glories of this sacred Name form the subject of the Apostle's pen : S. Paul speaks of our Blessed Lord as exalted above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come : he declares that God hath, as a reward for the intense humiliation of the Incarnation, highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every Name—that He is made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent Name than they. It is as though in the good counsels of God the Church were desirous to make a kind of reparation to her Divine Head for the scorn and insult heaped upon His human Name—she concentrates her affection and her reverence not on titles which tell of His divine glory, of his mediatorial prerogatives,

but on the Name by which He was familiarly known among men in the days of His flesh, the Name which He bore when He worked in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, the name so lightly, so slightly named among unbelievers—as of one Jesus who was dead, whom a mere fanaticism affirms to be alive.

And what, my brethren, is the meaning of this Sacred Name, this Name so highly exalted, this Name at which we bow head and heart, this Name which is as ointment poured forth, this Name which sounds so sweetly in the ear of every true Christian? Jesus, as you know, means a Saviour. It is thus explained by the angel, "Thou shalt call His "Name JESUS : for He shall *save* His people." By this very name He proclaims to us His office, His work for us. Just as all He did, and all He suffered was for us—nay, His very Incarnation, was for our sake, His human nature assumed to make us partakers of His Divine Nature—so the Name which He in His predestinating love had willed to take upon earth, was a Name which disclosed His love, His power on our behalf—a Name which set forth not His own glory, His own greatness, but His zeal, His care, His tenderness for us sinners, His desire for our salvation—wherefore a holy man once cried out, "Oh Jesus, how much hath it cost thee to be "Jesus, that is to say, my Saviour!" Yes, He is

our *Saviour*. It was a title which had been given great princes who had saved their people from foreign enemies, from external evils: but it is not from such things as these that our *Jesus* saves us; it is from our sins that He saves us, those sins the remembrance of which is grievous unto us, the burden of which is intolerable. Look out into the world around you, my brethren, and you will see something which is worse than pestilence, or famine, or the sword: something more grievous than chains, or poverty, or sickness, or death; or rather something which lies at the root of the outward ills of life, something which has poisoned the very springs of our existence, something which has blighted all the fair fruits and flowers of earth, something which, like a foul sediment, reposes at the bottom of life's cup of joy and needs but the slightest agitation to rise to its surface, something which, like a foul miasma, encompasses our being on every side, and chokes our upward aspirations, something which, like the thick clouds hanging around the mountains, shuts out from our view continually the lofty summits of the city of God, bathed in the pure sunlight of the Divine Presence. And what is this, brethren, but sin—sin which has introduced confusion where all was order, discord where all was harmony, disquiet where all was peace—sin, of which suffering is but the inevitable shadow, the true and unfailing penalty—

sin, which is but another name for sorrow—sin the one, the ineradicable, the master evil of our earthly life. And it is from this that our Lord has descended from the Divine Glory to save us ; it is from this that He wills to set His people free. This is, indeed, the great salvation—salvation from that which causes the whole Creation to groan and travail in pain together, salvation from that which cast man forth from Paradise, and sentenced him to misery and death. This is the very object of the Incarnation, the fruit of the Passion, the desire of the Saviour's heart. It was for this that He bowed the heavens and came down, for this that He was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and laid in the manger of Bethlehem. He might have delivered us from bodily disease, or from the primeval doom of labour, or from the obscurities and perplexities of the intellect ; He did none of these, for even had He done all, He would still have left our nature a wreck, He would still have left untouched the real fountain and source of all our evils—sin.

And how did Jesus save us from our sins ? From that first sin in Paradise, to the last crime which shall be committed, even until the Lord's return to judgment, men have been, and will be, continually provoking God to His face. For this vast pile of sin some expiation must be found—some atonement must be made. It is true that our God is a God

of infinite compassion and mercy, but He is also a God of infinite justice : He cannot pass over sin, as though it had never been ; He cannot by a single word blot it out from the face of Creation. Where, then, is a satisfaction to be found for the guilt of man ? He can offer none such himself, for his offering must be tainted by his own sin ; even future obedience cannot atone for past guilt.

But the Precious Blood of Jesus shed on Calvary has been a plenteous Redemption for all human sin ; in our human nature He has offered Himself a sound, sinless, atoning Sacrifice for His brethren ; He has won for them acceptance with God, He has opened out to them a path to their heavenly home, He has broken down the impenetrable barrier between man and God, He has done that which *can* save His people from their sins—He has been their JESUS. In one sense, indeed, His whole life was an acceptable offering to the eternal Father ; but I need not remind you that it is the great act on Calvary which formed that one full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world ; it was there as He hung upon the painful Cross, during the long weary hours of the first Good Friday, that He effected for us, and in our nature, a perfect atonement for our sins. He had, indeed, been a JESUS, a Saviour to His people, through the course of His earthly ministry ; He had saved

multitudes from those bodily plagues and infirmities, which are the indirect and very often the direct fruits of sin, so that S. Matthew ventures to apply even to these miracles of healing the sacred words of Isaiah, "Himself took our infirmities and bare "our sicknesses ;" He had often in these gracious acts gone to the very root of the disease, and proved Himself the Saviour of the soul as well as of the body ; He had said to the paralytic, ere He gave strength to his limbs, "Son, thy sins be forgiven "thee ;" He had spoken words of peace to the sinful woman, who washed His feet with her tears ; He had conveyed pardon to the woman taken in adultery ; but these separate acts of forgiveness were but the faint foreshadowings of that one world-embracing pardon which His wounded and bleeding Body won for sinners, when He was sacrificed upon the altar of the Cross—the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.

Are *we*, then, saved from our sins ? Do we know in all its fulness the efficacy of that Precious Name of JESUS ? Alas ! my brethren, you have only to cast the most cursory glance on the state of things around you to know that the Christian world is literally steeped in sin, that the majority of those who profess and call themselves by Christ's Name fall short, I will not say of the perfection to which our Lord summons us, but even of such a life and

conversation as shall not be in glaring contradiction to the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. How many so-called Christians still live in their sins, almost glory in their sins, at last die in their sins, instead of being saved from them ! How many baptized Christians have returned to the bondage from which Christ set them free, and have voluntarily placed themselves in the darkness of that prison from which He would have led them forth to the light of heaven ! Alas ! what a thought it is that, of all the lost, there will not be one who has not had a JESUS—a Saviour who shed for him His blood !

Yet on this side the grave there is hope for all ; “if any man sin we have an Advocate with “the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is “the Propitiation for our sins.” However great a sinner then, you are, you have the offer of pardon and salvation ; your soul may be saved through the might of that blessed Name of JESUS. Only remember that God’s offer of pardon is made to you as to one who has the awful power of accepting or rejecting it. He will not force salvation upon you against your will ; if you are to be saved it must be by a vigorous effort on your own part, as well as by an amazing stretch of the Divine Compassion—you must not lose a moment, you must at once fly from the wrath to come, you must throw

yourselves, ere another day, aye ere another hour passes, upon the mercy of your Saviour, and beg Him to hide you in His wounds from the fire of eternal vengeance, to deliver your soul as a bird out of the snare of the fowler—to save you from that burden which is dragging you down to ruin—your sins. Remember that He came down from Heaven, that He died upon the Cross, not to save you *in* your sins, but to save you *from* them; remember that while you cling to your sin, you must be rejecting your Saviour; that He will not (nay, we may dare to say that He *cannot*,) embrace you while you love, while you cherish in your bosom, the accursed thing which He hates. I do not say that you must entirely rid yourself of your sin before you approach your Saviour; that you cannot do in your own strength, it is He alone who can give you power for such a difficult and toilsome task; but you must heartily resolve and desire to be delivered by Him from the intolerable burden, you must at least *wish* to be saved from that from which He is the *Saviour*.

But others there are who are gradually learning in God's own school all that is involved in that highly-exalted Name of JESUS. Even in baptized Christians there still remains “their sinful nature “weakened, not extinguished quite.” And the tendency of that sinful nature, provoked by the triple assaults of the world, the flesh, and the Devil,

is to issue in acts of positive sin—of rebellion against the all-holy will of God. And thus it is that even true Christians—those who are in the main striving to live to God and do His will, find themselves oppressed and burdened by the weight of their sins, and cry out for deliverance ; their heart constantly assures them that they need a Saviour, to save them from their sins.

Sanctification, my brethren, is a life-long process, and we only learn step by step all that is involved in it. That death unto sin, that life unto God which was conveyed to the soul in Holy Baptism can only be realised to its full extent in the struggles, and sorrows, and wrestlings of many years : little by little the old man is crucified with Christ, and the new man is formed within us : one by one evil lusts and habits are crushed and quelled by the power of the Spirit working within us : one by one the features of the Divine character are traced upon our souls. We do not for the most part suffer the Holy Ghost to lead us on in one calm undeviating path from grace to glory ; even when our course is on the whole one of progress, it is marked by frequent backslidings ; we are like men rowing against a rapid stream, who ever and anon suffer their arms to drop by their side, and allow themselves to be carried down the swift current, so losing in a few minutes the fruit of long-continued toil ; we

Moiter by the way-side when we should be pressing forward to the heavenly city ; we receive large supplies of God's grace, and then suffer it to evaporate in idle professions and unreal aspirations.

And many of us can, perhaps, look back to some long period of our lives—it may be the whole course of our childhood and youth—in which we were living in a fearful alienation from God, and the things which concern our everlasting peace—when some early sin was allowed to have its way unchecked within us, withering up our spiritual life, and forming a thick cloud between our souls and heaven. If we had died then, we could but have been lost for ever. And even if by God's unmerited mercy we escaped that extreme peril, yet what a fearful loss both of grace and glory did those mis-spent years bring to us—what coils of evil habits and dispositions did they wind round our hearts, what a terrible hardness and callousness to sin did they bring with them, what a familiarity with evil which even now taints our inner life, what radical defects of character which will perhaps accompany us to our grave, what loss of opportunities for making progress in the ways of holiness, what dishonour to God, what despite to the Holy Spirit, what grief to angels, what misery to ourselves, what mischief to the souls of others !

And now that by the mercy of God we are recovered from our misery, and are earnestly seeking God, yet it is only by degrees that we can be really saved from our sins—only by degrees that the Name of JESUS can be fully realised for us. It is by the discipline of a whole life for the most part that we are rescued from our spiritual enemies. When we first begin to serve God, we know neither the greatness of His Love ; nor the extent of our own wretchedness : we fancy perhaps that we have made great progress when in reality we are but at the very beginning ; we mistake the spiritual fervour with which God indulges us, as a sign of our own advance in holiness ; we are at first carried on so powerfully by the grace of God, that we find little or no difficulty in overcoming our sinful inclinations, and putting into action Christian graces. God in His Love adapts Himself to our strength : He gives us little temptation, and much grace. But the depths of our sinful nature lie slumbering in their tranquillity, and it needs but the winds of adversity and trial to lash into fury the still surface of our soul's life. It is easy to be gentle when we are not provoked, and active when there is no temptation to sloth, and truthful when we have nothing to gain by deceit, and patient when our trials are slight. But time passes on, and the face of life changes. Circum-

stances occur which bring out into prominence the evil that is in us and favour its development ; an unforgiving temper becomes visible in those who receive injuries, or self-will in those who are opposed, or impatience and irritability in those who are afflicted by sickness ; old faults which seem to have disappeared re-appear under new forms, and sins which we thought subdued trouble us again by their importunity. And then it is that we groan, being burdened, and feel our need again and again of One who shall indeed save us from our sins. We feel that our enemies are too strong for us alone, that help must come from without if we are to be indeed victorious. And we are right in this conviction ; there is One, and One only, who can help us in the struggle, One whose very Name promises to us all that we need. Out of the depth of our misery let us cry to the depth of His mercy ; let us plead with Him in prayer, let us cast ourselves on His promises, let us remind Him of His sacred Name of Jesus, let us seek Him in the Holy Sacrament of His Love ; He will appear to us in our loneliness and in our anguish, He will come to us and take up His abode in our heart ; He will give us strength against the sin which does so easily beset us ; we shall find that stronger is He that is with us than they that are against us—that we carry within us a new, a regenerate nature, that we

live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us—that He is gradually drawing us and conforming us to Himself, absorbing, so to speak, into Himself all the elements of our being—that He has indeed proved Himself to be to us our Jesus, for He has saved us from our sins.

SERMON V.

THE SHOWING FORTH OF CHRIST TO THE SOUL.

(FESTIVAL OF THE EPIPHANY.)

S. MATTHEW ii. 1—2.

“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.”

THE Epiphany or Manifestation of our Lord to the Gentiles in the person of these wise men from the East, which we commemorate to-day, is for many reasons one of the most striking and memorable events in the Gospel narrative. It is the only recognition of respect which our Lord in His sacred infancy obtains from the great ones of the earth, yet even in Bethlehem we see an anticipation of the future triumphs of Christ's Church, when in the words of the prophet, “Kings should be her “nursing fathers, and their queens her nursing “mothers.”

It is again the first opening of the door of faith to the Gentile world ; our Lord is already even from

the manger stretching forth His arms of mercy, and exclaiming, “Behold me, behold me, unto a “nation that is not called by His Name.” It is again one of the few occasions on which the Divine dignity of the Incarnate One breaks forth in a temporary blaze of splendour from behind the veil of His human weakness and humiliations, when by a strange contradiction we behold men full of the learning and wealth of the East, prostrate on the stable floor of a country inn before a lately born Infant, and offering Him the richest produce of their country. Very different visitors these to the simple Jewish shepherds, who on the night of the Nativity had been summoned by angelic voices to pay their adorations to the King of Israel—very different visitors, men, doubtless, of acute intellect and vast wealth : yet, as ever afterwards in the history of the Church, rich and poor alike find a common refuge and meeting-point in Him, who knows no respect of persons ; the simple and ignorant find in Jesus One who can sympathise with all their deepest needs, the loftiest reason can but bow in adoration before the unspeakable mystery of Bethlehem—God made Man. No wonder surely that this marvellous scene of the Epiphany has fixed itself deeply in the heart of Christians, that it has formed a favourite subject for the painter, that it is commemorated by a special Festival in the Church. How strange, how mysterious

the whole event as it stands recorded in the pages of Holy Scripture—how singularly alone and apart and unconnected with all that precedes and all that follows ! The eastern strangers suddenly appear on the scene, and as suddenly disappear ; nothing is told us of their past history, nothing of the effect of their visit on their own mind or that of their countrymen. For once the thick curtain which shrouds our Lord in the days of His Flesh from the gaze of the outlying heathen world is withdrawn, and we behold eastern sages, who, whatever traditional knowledge they may have possessed, were certainly aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, kneeling with their rich presents before the Divine Infant, who had come to be the God, not of the Jew only, but also of the Gentile. In that brief flash the future history of the Church stands revealed ; the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles is already broken down, there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but Christ is all and in all. But all this is by a kind of Divine anticipation ; God is showing unto His servants things which must be hereafter. The Epiphany leads as it were to no immediate results ; our Lord's personal ministry is all but entirely confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel ; and it is only when we look back upon this scene in Bethlehem that we see that the predictions of the prophets

find even in our Lord's infancy their primary fulfilment—"The Gentiles shall come to Thy Light, and "Kings to the brightness of Thy rising ; they shall "bring gold and incense, and they shall shew forth "the praises of the Lord. The Kings of Tarshish "and of the isles shall give presents, the Kings of "Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts."

It may be well briefly to relate the chief points of the narrative as contained in the Gospel. In the days of Herod the Great, the inhabitants of Jerusalem with their king were startled by the arrival of a company, which may well have recalled to their mind the train which as they had heard had long ago followed the queen of Sheba, on her visit to Solomon. Doubtless there, too, might be seen the camels bearing the peculiar produce of the east—gold, frankincense, myrrh—the long line of attendants—the pomp of eastern wealth. It must have been an unwonted sight for the inhabitants of the Holy City, but their wonder was increased when the wise men or Magi, (tradition says that they were three in number, and were of royal rank,) stated that they had come to offer their homage to the new-born King of the Jews, whose birth had been declared to them by the appearance of a brilliant star in the heavens. Whence these wise men derived their knowledge we cannot tell, whether it was that some remembrance may have lingered among the people

of the East of that ancient prophecy of the Gentile Balaam—"There shall come a star out of Jacob,"—or whether their minds were stirred by that vague and undefined expectation of a Saviour, which, as we know from ancient writers, prevailed at that very time—or whether, lastly, God may have vouchsafed to them, as to Job of old, although not of His own people, some special revelation of Himself. Be this as it may, it is clear that for some reason or other they had learned to connect the appearance of the Star with the birth of the Messiah. We must not, however, fail to notice the venture of faith made by these earnest and truth-seeking men. There was, doubtless, much which to human eye might seem rash and foolish in their journey. They had no special promise of success, the journey was long and toilsome ; was it not possible that after all they might return disappointed ? They would hear the objections, possibly the ridicule, of those around them. But in spite of all Faith conquered, and they set out. They reach in safety the Holy Land, the star still shines brightly and guides them on their way ; they direct their steps to Jerusalem with the question, Where is He that is born King of the Jews ? But they find the chosen people of God in utter ignorance of the event, by which their own minds were so completely possessed ; the birth at Bethlehem has not reached their ears ; and the

arrival of the Magi, with their strange question, seems rather to confound and perplex Herod and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, than to fill them with any like joy and eagerness. Herod fears for his throne ; Jerusalem cares not to be awakened from her spiritual slumber. A solemn assembly, however, of the chief priests and scribes is called by the king, and the question is proposed to them, where the Christ is to be born ? There is little difficulty in giving the right answer ; the prophet Micah had long ago with accurate fidelity indicated *Bethlehem* as the birth-place of the future Governor of Israel. Fitting type and image, indeed, was the answer of the scribes, of the fate of the unhappy race, who by their past history, by their ritual and their worship, by their sacred books and their own interpretation of them, seem continually to point others to a Messiah, whom they nevertheless as a nation reject to this day. The scribes return to the studies which proved so fruitless for their own spiritual benefit ; but the wise men before leaving Jerusalem have an interview with Herod, in which the hypocritical king enquires the exact period of the appearance of the star, and requests a visit from them on their return, that on their information he, too, may pay his respects to the new-born King. They leave Jerusalem, the Star gradually moves on before them until it shines over the

stable of Bethlehem. Here again is a trial of faith. Can this poor and despised Infant be He, Whom they had travelled so many miles to see? is this poor stable the palace of the King of kings, this manger His Throne, these beasts of the field His courtiers, this poor Jewish maiden His mother? Yes, faith pierces through the disguises under which the Eternal has concealed His glory ; they, the rich and the wise, fall down and worship ; they open their treasures—they present to Him gifts—Gold as to the great King, incense as to the God of Heaven, myrrh as to Him whose Body wound in linen with myrrh and spices was one day to lie in the tomb.

And now their mission is accomplished, their object attained ; their eyes have seen the Lord's salvation ; and doubtless they did not leave without receiving from Him whom they had thus faithfully and lovingly sought spiritual gifts and graces far more precious than those material offerings by which they had outwardly expressed their heart's adoration. They are favoured by God with a direct communication in a dream, in obedience to which they return no more to Herod, but depart into their country another way—fit type of those who having been with Jesus return not to the world which they have left, but by a hitherto untravelled way seek the true country—Heaven.

Here the history ends, but brief as it is it is not only full of interest as a leading and typical event in our Lord's life, but also contains many spiritual lessons for all ages, which we should do well to ponder and practice. It may, I think, be taken as representing to us the whole course of the spiritual life.

First, we have the call of God to the soul, represented by the star which summoned the Magi to the cradle of their King. Now this call, as it comes to us at the present day, may be a call either to enter upon God's service for the first time, or to reach forth to a higher devotion, and a more perfect conformity to His Divine will. It is no doubt true that were all Christians living in a way at all worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, were they, to say the least, not utterly neglectful of the grace given to them at Holy Baptism, all the calls of God would be of this latter kind. But we cannot conceal from ourselves the sad fact that among a large proportion even of baptized Christians the life of God in the soul seems dormant, if not wholly extinguished—no hatred of sin, no love of God, prayer neglected or repeated as a mere form, God's word unopened or read as a lifeless task, without prayer and therefore without profit, the Blessed Sacrament never received, or (what is perhaps even worse) received at stated intervals

from a mere compliance with custom, without penitence, without faith, without love. Or it may be that some remnants of a higher life are yet struggling for existence, but growing daily weaker, the good seed fast becoming choked by some deadly sin wilfully indulged, or if not that, by the subtle spirit of worldliness and self-indulgence, which does its fatal work as surely even if more slowly. To souls in this condition, God in His infinite mercy sends many a call to repentance ; He might indeed justly permit them to perish after the rejection of their first grace, but in His long-suffering He condescends again and again to summon them to Himself. These calls are of very various kinds : now a sickness nigh unto death, now want of worldly success, now a sudden glimpse of the reality of death and hell, now a newly-awakened longing after the beauty of holiness. O if there should be any among us who are at present living to self and to sin, and who yet feel that the voice of God is calling them to forsake the past, and begin with this new year a new life, to tear out of their heart with unsparing hand some long-indulged sin which is eating away their soul's life, let them beware how they trifle with such convictions, or allow them to pass away without leading to some definite result.

From whatever external source such calls may come, let them be sure that they are nothing less than

the voice of God the Holy Spirit speaking within us, it may be (awful thought!) for the last time; but let them remember also that the time may come when they shall be unable even to wish to do better; the very wish is a free gift of God's grace—how many times has it been given in vain! Let them this night kneel before God, and beg of Him to accept them, to teach them how to repent and do works meet for repentance, and let them be sure that if they seek in earnest they will not seek in vain, and that they will look back upon the beginning of this year as a time which has brought them greater happiness and peace than words can express.

And for those who have already entered on the spiritual life, and are at least *endeavouring* to serve God, there may also be an Epiphany call. Is there no work which God is calling us to undertake for Him? no slackness in our service? no infirmities of temper or disposition (it may be slight ones) unchecked, no little duties neglected, no failings in our zeal, our patience, our humility? The years are passing quickly by us. Does each find us nearer to God? has our spiritual life been quickened and strengthened during the course of the past year? is our faith firmer, our hope more settled, our love more constant? If not, the fault is in ourselves, not in the grace of God which is more than sufficient for us. To us also there is a call to

gird up the loins of our minds, to trim our lamps, to seek the face of Jesus more earnestly.

Secondly, we may, I think, see, in the difficulties which the wise men encountered, a type of those spiritual trials with which God in His wisdom often sees fit to try souls, which have entered upon the road to heaven. These trials are of very various kinds, and we have not now time to attempt any enumeration of them. But we may be quite sure that if we are in the right path we shall have them in some shape or other ; it was well said of old—“My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare “thy soul for temptation.”

We may often have to walk without the guiding light of the Star ; our journey may at times appear long and toilsome ; our expectations of some spiritual gain may seem to be disappointed perhaps just at the moment when we had confidently looked for success ; when we had hoped for a time of quiet repose we may find ourselves obliged once more to set forth on our way ; God will lead us by a path very different to that which we had planned and proposed for ourselves ; yet let us ever press forward with brave and trustful hearts, though our eyes be sometimes blinded with tears, and our hearts fail us for fear. He, Whom we love, is journeying with us in our saddest moments, even though our eyes be holden that we should not know

Him ; He, “the bright and morning Star,” will one day burst upon our enraptured view in the full radiance of His splendour, and as we near the presence of our God we too shall “rejoice with exceeding great joy.”

Lastly, in the homage rendered by the wise men we may see a representation of that spiritual service which Jesus claims of us, and which it is at once our duty and our joy to render freely to Him. Having once tasted that the Lord is gracious, having found Him whom our soul loveth, with what offerings shall we come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the high God ? The presents of the wise men—the gold, the frankincense, the myrrh—may fitly represent to us three marks in the Christian character, which may, I think, with truth, be said to be found existing, at least, in some measure, in all those who are truly Christ’s. The gold—that most precious of all metals, may well image forth to us the crown and flower of all Christian graces—love. Frankincense may be taken as the symbol of prayer, which cloud-like mounts from earth to heaven. Myrrh speaks to us of suffering and self-denial.

I need scarcely speak to you of the paramount necessity of cultivating a spirit of Christian Love ; the words of our Lord, and of the Apostle of Love, though too often far from our hearts, are sufficiently

familiar to our ears. But it is well for us all to be reminded that without this grace all else is worse than useless, and there is ever rising up the temptation, even in the hearts of religious persons, to substitute outward works of charity, mechanically performed, for that inner glowing love of souls for whom Christ died, which can be kindled in our hearts only by union with that source and centre of Love—the loving Heart of our Redeemer. If, then, we are conscious, (as, alas ! we all must be,) that we are too much wrapped up in ourselves and our own interests, even it may be our spiritual interests, let us seek the remedy in a more earnest and persevering waiting on Him, whose love is never weary ; let us seek Him more and more in prayer, in meditation, in Holy Communion, and thus shall that mind be gradually formed in us, which was in Christ Jesus, and from that ever-burning fire we shall catch some glow of warmth.

The second offering is Prayer. Amid whatever differences of age, of rank, of character, even of religious belief, you will find one seal unmistakably fixed upon all God's true servants—they have been men of Prayer. For Prayer is not only a means by which definite evils may be averted, and definite blessings obtained, through the mercy of the Heavenly Father ; it is also a Communion of the soul with its God, of the creature with the

Creator. Without this Communion the soul must wither and die; created for God it can live only in Him. "Thou hast made us for Thy self, and "our heart knoweth no rest until it reposeth in "Thee." Let us endeavour, then, to make prayer more of a reality, to seek and find all the rich blessings with which it fertilizes the soul.

Lastly, there must be the preserving salt of self-denial. An easy, self-indulgent life leads to eternal ruin, as surely as a life stained with positive sin. A true Christian must know something of the weight of his Master's Cross; he must know what it is to deny self in its many forms; he will not be ready to go to the extreme limit even of lawful pleasures.

Love—Prayer—Self-denial—these, indeed, are wings which bear us heaven-ward, offerings which, albeit we have first received them of our Lord by the action of His grace on the soul, He will, nevertheless, accept and crown in that day of His final Epiphany, when to Him, no longer an Infant in the rude stable, but a King on the throne of judgment, every knee shall bow, Him every tongue confess.

SERMON VI.

READINESS TO DO AND TO SUFFER.

(QUINQUAGESIMA.)

S. LUKE xviii. 31, 32, 33.

"Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on : and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death : and the third day He shall rise again."

THESE words, which form the opening of the Gospel for this day, present to us in outline the leading scenes of that Divine Passion, wherein Jesus Christ is once more to be evidently set forth crucified among us. Already, ere we have yet entered upon our Lenten Fast, the Church is pointing us to its goal and crown ; she bids us look beyond the path of penitence and fear, to the Mount of Calvary, which we are to reach in the last Great and Holy Week ; she animates us for our struggle with self and sin, by setting before our eyes the Divine Victim, making by His one oblation of

Himself once offered, a full and sufficient Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world ; she even throws forward on our path some rays of the Easter triumph. Once more in the annual round of the Church's seasons we go up to Jerusalem, once more we enter upon the road which will lead us to Gethsemane, to Calvary, to the Holy Sepulchre ; once more God is about to bring to our remembrance not only our sins, but the love which at the cost of life itself has provided us with an all-prevailing atonement for them. May He, Who in His infinite mercy permits us to see another Lent, help us all to use the holy season which approaches, to His greater glory, and our soul's salvation !

The circumstances under which Our Lord spoke the words of our text deserve our special attention.

It was not the first occasion on which He had warned His apostles of His approaching sufferings, and attempted to check in them that spirit of half-religious, half-worldly enthusiasm which could end only in disappointment. By examining the Gospels we find that already on two previous occasions our Lord had plainly, if with less minuteness of detail, set before them the shame and agony in which His Ministry of Love was to end.

The hopes which were agitating the mind of the Jewish people generally, found a ready response in the minds of the Apostles ; it is true that they had

given up all that they might follow Christ, but it was not without a secret hope that after all His Kingdom might be found to be of this world ; doubtless they were full of an ardent zeal for the righteousness and the truth which Our Lord had come to proclaim among men, but they would have been well pleased that the New Law, which had been published from the Mount, should be embodied in some visible shape before the eyes of men, in connexion with their own national life—that the ancient glories of Judaism should be revived in the person of a triumphant Messiah, who should reign until He had put all the enemies of God's people under His feet. Such aspirations as these maintained to the last a struggle for existence, as men's cherished day-dreams ever will. Even immediately after this third and most solemn warning, Salome asks for her two sons the right hand and the left in the New Kingdom, and again our Lord points them to the Cross. The brief agony of the Passion indeed converts their hopes into despair, but in the joy of the great forty days of the Resurrection they ask if the time has now arrived when Our Lord will restore again the kingdom to Israel. Only after the illuminating Fire of Pentecost does the conviction reach them that Our Lord's reign is within the hearts and consciences of men, and that His Church on earth is to be militant, not triumphant.

At the commencement of His Ministry Our Lord had been completely silent upon His Passion. He is at this period presented to us as the Great Prophet of the New Kingdom, establishing its claims by miracles, calling its future governors, instructing them with the teaching of authority. But as Our Lord's Divinity gradually dawns upon the mind of the Apostles, there comes the sharper discipline which accompanies increased light. S. Peter, immediately after his great confession of faith, is met with the sad, unexpected words which tell of coming woe, and his indignant repudiation of them is rebuked as the very spirit of Satan himself. In the quiet journey through Galilee which followed the Transfiguration, Our Lord, in a series of private conversations with His Apostles on His coming sufferings, supplied the needful check to the over-ardent longings which may have been excited by that solitary manifestation of His Divine Glory.

But now that He is rapidly approaching the Holy City to offer Himself for the sins of His people, immediately after the magnificent promises made to the Twelve, and to all who like them should forsake all for Christ—ere yet the Hosannas are sounding in their ears, and, in the momentary triumph of Palm Sunday, the world seems to go after Him—He tells the Apostles of the final issue

of their journey, of the inevitable end which was now so fast approaching ; He describes the last scenes in fuller detail ; He is not silent on the part which the Gentiles have to play in them, on the mocking, the spitting, the scourging.

Yet, my brethren, with what exceeding calmness and dignity is the announcement made, almost as though our Lord were making it about another than Himself ! There is in the words nothing of human excitement and passion—there is the steadfastness of calm resolve, the recognition of the fulfilment of the eternal purposes of God, the accurate weighing and quiet acceptance of each point in the future agony, the confident expectation of the triumph which shall in the end succeed all.

In all this, my brethren, there is abundant food for meditation, abundance of Divine teaching for our souls. Let us by God's help endeavour to learn something from our Divine Pattern, which by His grace we may put into practice in our future lives.

Our Lord's example, as set before us in these words, speaks to us of the source of strength in toil and suffering. For our Lord during His Passion was engaged in a Divine work, as well as enduring an unequalled suffering. He was winning back for God the souls of men. During each moment His

human will consented to the inflictions of His torturers, and refused to accept the succour which His Divine Nature was ever ready to afford : there was not a single moment, from the Agony to the Cross, at which He could not have prayed to His Father, and He would have given Him more than twelve legions of angels. And thus our Lord's sufferings were the result of a divine energy, as well as of a divine endurance. And we, who are accustomed to look upon our work as rather the result of our own wills, while our sufferings commonly come upon us whether we will or no, may find, in the words in which our Lord announced His coming trial, the true spirit in which we should go forth to meet the purposes of God concerning us whether in action or in suffering.

However varied the lot of different men may be, yet each man's life falls under these two great divisions—Labour and Suffering. God has not indeed left us altogether without joy on earth : yet every one must feel that joy (I am not of course speaking of that Joy which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and which may be felt even amid outward trouble) is not and cannot be the air in which we are to breathe upon earth. It is rather something which comes to us from without, evanescent in its nature, the bloom upon the fruit of life, lost by pursuit of it, often found by disregard of it, in short

something which God has not willed should be of the essence of our life here.

And thus it is that labour (including within this word those innocent pleasures which God scatters so profusely on our path) and suffering may be said to divide between them the empire over men's lives. In Paradise indeed the condition of man was altogether different ; there his work was not to be distinguished from his pleasure, and no touch of suffering marred his bliss both of body and mind. But the Fall brought with it the necessity to work, the liability to suffer ; and the laws then imposed upon Adam continue to be the laws even of a redeemed humanity. The Christian is not exempted from the law of labour ; he has his share, it may be more than his share, of the ordinary troubles of life. But such is God's goodness that the toil originally imposed as a curse has been in great part turned into a blessing ; you do not need, my brethren, to be told of the inseparable connection which exists between honest, persevering work, and a contented happy spirit—nay, you doubtless many of you know something of a delight in work for work's sake, of the pleasure which results from the conscious exertion of the powers we possess, whether of body or mind. But such work as this, right and noble as it is, and the source of some of the purest joys with which God has blessed us, may

be, and very often is, done in a worldly spirit, and for worldly objects. Our Lord's example, in the Gospel for to-day, points us to a higher standard, to work which is very near akin to suffering, and only distinguishable from it by requiring effort as well as endurance. It will not always be the case that the work which God gives us to do is that which brings with it most satisfaction and pleasure to ourselves; it will not always be successful, as this world counts success; it will not always bring with it its own reward. You know that it is a common thing in the world for men to toil and work without seeing the fruit of their exertions; that great and good men often seem to have lived in vain; that we are constantly entering upon the heritage of other men's labours. And such facts as these we often see reproduced upon a smaller scale in ordinary every-day life. We cannot expect that all our work will bring with it self-satisfaction, appreciation from others, success in this world. And if God sets before us some thankless, difficult, apparently hopeless task, which, though it comes before us in the plain path of duty, we nevertheless shrink from with the whole power of our soul, whence are we to derive energy and courage to undertake it, what motive is there of sufficient force to hinder us from turning aside from the path which lies before us, and from declining to take upon

ourselves a burden which we have the power of refusing? Here all motives which are of this earth break down ; the mere sense of duty may give way; the hope of a brighter future may die within us; the manly resolution to succeed at all risks may be succeeded by despair ; one thing, and one thing only, is certain to give strength and perseverance in the work, however hard, however unlovely—entire trust and confidence in the grace of God to give us all, and more than all, the power and energy that we need.

Whence think you that the human soul of Jesus found grace for that mighty work of our salvation on the eve of His Passion ? Was it not from the infinite succour which it drew from its union with the Godhead ?

And if there should be any among us who feels himself unequal to the work which God has laid upon him, who for some reason or other shrinks from that special task which is imposed on him in the Lord's vineyard, whose service seems to bring with it not joy but sorrow, let him not imagine that he has nothing to look to but his own weak resolves, his own failing energies, his own desperate efforts, but let him take courage in the thought of the omnipotence of God's grace, let him cast himself into the arms of the everlasting Mercy, and in the strength and in the name of God let him go

forth calmly to do all that God would have him do, knowing that he who has God on his side cannot but win, that his work and labour, whatever it may be, is not in vain in the Lord.

But there is another side to our life here. There enters into the life of each one of us, whether we will or no, some share of sorrow and suffering. The Cross is stamped upon everything below. We have not lived long in the world before we find out that we are the inheritors of Adam's punishment as well as of Adam's sin, that the path of life must often be trodden with eyes blinded by tears, and hearts faint with anguish.

But in the kingdom of grace suffering as well as labour is raised to a higher level, and turned into a source of blessing and happiness. God uses it for the most part in this world not as a mere instrument of punishment, but as a means of leading the souls of men to Himself. To the careless, unawakened sinner, He sends it that the sharp discipline may teach him at least the vanity of this world's happiness, and so remove one obstacle from his path towards true conversion. To souls already in a state of grace He sends it that the loving correction may advance them still further on their heavenly road, may purge away their yet remaining frailties and infirmities, may conform them more closely to the Image of His Dear Son.

And let us be sure that at some period or other of our lives God will most certainly lead us into the cloud of sorrow. There are some of you, doubtless, who know little of all this, whose present troubles may almost seem happiness when remembered at a later time : there are others, perhaps, who know it all only too well. But for all there is strength and encouragement in the thought of Our Lord as He gazes with calm and steadfast eyes upon the Cross prepared for Him, and quietly goes forward to meet it. It is certain that our special trial, whether it lies hid in the far-off future or is even now before our eyes, will, when it comes upon us, seem not to be joyous but grievous : that we shall be tempted to cry out that we could have borne anything rather than that particular Cross which the Lord lays upon us, that we shall perhaps be unable even clearly to trace God's hand in it, or to understand how it is working for the furtherance of our spiritual life. Only let us not shrink or draw back ; it is true that there is an infinite distance between our sin-caused sufferings, and the sinless agonies endured for us by the Holy One ; yet we have the authority of God's Word for bidding us, as we run our Christian race, look towards Him, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame. And surely if anything could nerve us bravely to go forth, and

meet our sufferings, whether they be of mind, body, or estate, with a resolute heart and a resigned will, it would be the sight of Our Saviour, as He willingly ascends to Jerusalem, and speaks of all that awaits Him there, only to confirm and encourage the hearts of others; it would be the thought that He has taken away the real sting of all our sufferings, and is ready Himself to help us as we bear our cross after Him along the way of sorrows.

Only let us look to God in all our toil and all our suffering upon earth, and we shall find rest for our souls. Only let us trust Him completely, Him only, and all will be well with us in time and in eternity. Only let us offer ourselves to Him without reserve that He may accomplish His blessed will in us and by us, whether He calls us to do or to suffer for His sake. Let us lift up our hearts to Him, and say with one of His saints of old—"Lord, give me grace to do what Thou commandest, and command what Thou pleasest." "Lord, give me grace to suffer what Thou permittest, and permit what Thou pleasest"—and let us be sure we shall not so pray in vain. And little indeed will it matter to us if a few years hence we find ourselves within the eternal rest of God, that we have been led thither through a path of much exertion or suffering during the little time of our sojourn here upon earth.

Another Lent is close upon us. May we indeed seek our Lord more earnestly in prayer, in self-denial, in meditation, in reading His Holy Word, in Holy Communion, and all this in no hard, formal, self-satisfied spirit, but in the strength and energy of that Divine Charity and Love to God and Man, of which we have heard to-day, without which all our doings are nothing worth. So shall we best learn the lessons of the Divine Passion, towards which we are hastening, and be ever more and more taught of God, till we after our measure be ready to exclaim with the Apostle—"I can do all things, "I can suffer all things, through Christ which "strengtheneth me."

SERMON VII.

MAN'S IGNORANCE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

(LENT.)

GENESIS XIII. 38.

"And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

LET us think to-day, not upon such an inexhaustible subject as man's ignorance, but upon a special mode of its manifestation—his ignorance of the ways of God's Providence.

"The Providence of God"—what thoughts do the words suggest to us! For by Faith we understand not only that the worlds were framed by the word of God, but that the whole order of things then constituted is under His direct and immediate rule and guidance. The God of the Christian is not a God who has constructed a vast machine, and then abandoned it to the laws of its own working. True indeed it is that in the counsels of eternity all

is fore-ordained and fore-arranged ; but those counsels are unfolded in time under the direction of an all-wise, an all-loving God. He leaves not for an instant the universe which He has called out of nothingness ; He upholdeth all things by the word of His power : He is not far from every one of us—yea, in Him we live, and move, and have our being. The course of history, the destinies of nations, the rise and fall of empires, the struggles and successes of the Church of God, the outer and inner life of each immortal being, nay, the very fate of the birds which flit around our path, are meted out in number, measure, and weight, by Him for whose all-comprehending observation nothing is too great or too small.

Yet here, too, as in the whole wide field of human knowledge, our ignorance compasses us about—here, too, demands are made upon our faith and trust. “Known unto God are all His works, “from the beginning of the world,” but by degrees only are the successive scenes of the Divine plan unfolded upon the theatre of this earth. This is true as well of the general order of events, beginning at the Creation, and ending at the Day of Judgment, as of each minor development of God’s vast purpose, which is embraced within that general order. How little does each successive generation, as it passes over the earth, comprehend its place in the

plan which is being unrolled by the everlasting Will ; how little can it accurately measure the amount of success or progress which it is permitted to reach, the part which it is permitted to play in the great onward-moving scheme of God's Providence !

Standing as we do this day at a considerable distance alike from the fountain-heads of Creation, and of Christianity, how unable are we to measure the relation in which we stand toward the consummation of all things ! are we to look upon the state of things around us as hopeful, or as discouraging ? is the course of the ages leading mankind nearer to the light of God, or is it dragging him down further into the depths of the mystery of iniquity ? is Christ's Church about to triumph gloriously, or is the light of the faith to be maintained by a forlorn band against a world penetrated with the spirit of Anti-Christ ? There is much to be said on both sides ; God fulfils Himself in many ways ; we can but wait and pray, undismayed by threatening tokens, content to be ignorant of the direction in which God's Providence is moving—knowing that whatever betides us God is in the midst of His Church, therefore shall she not be moved, God shall help her, and that right early.

Yet as we read the future in the light of the past how much comfort and encouragement do we gain ! Unable as we are to trace the way in which we are

moving forward, yet can we follow with our eye as from some lofty eminence the manifold windings of the path by which we have been conducted hither. The City of God, which we know not aright, as toil-worn and anxious we tread its streets, is revealed to us in all the fulness and beauty of its proportions as we gaze on it from the valley beneath. What is the history of the world hitherto but a record of the gradual working out of the eternal will of God amid apparent weakness and failure and disappointment? What could be more baffling, more perplexing to the intellect than the condition of the human race at the time of our Lord's Incarnation among men—the old heathen civilization, after exhibiting the full strength and weakness of unassisted human nature, already tottering to decline beneath the weight of its own vices—hordes of barbarians ready to sweep like a deluge over the efforts and successes of centuries—the Jews, the elect people of God, burying the light of God's truth beneath an organised system of formalism and hypocrisy? Where amid the wreck and ruin of a decaying world was the God of the human race to be found? to what purpose had generation after generation toiled and suffered upon the earth? But it was at the very moment when the heavens looked blackest that the Day-spring was already rising in the far East. The

time of preparation and prediction had been accomplished: it had been necessary to produce in man a conviction of his need of a Redeemer, and this could only be effected by the exhibition on a large scale of the practical failure of the moral law, whether as embodied in the Decalogue, or as written in the heart of the heathen ; the sad spectacle of a perverted conscience, of an inoperative Law, had been necessary in order to reveal to man his own weakness and need ; God in His Providence had been training mankind to welcome their future Deliverer, and it was at the very moment when men's hopes were lowest that they received their Crown and Consummation.

But indeed it is not only on such a mighty canvass as the world-wide preparation for the Gospel that this law of God's dealings with His creatures is depicted. May we not see everywhere in Holy Scripture illustrations of the truth that the ways of God's Providence are for the most part hidden from man, that not only are they not in accordance with our pre-conceived ideas, but very often contradict them ? Consider, for instance, the unexpected election of those who are called to bear a prominent part in the history of the chosen race, the manner in which expectations apparently legitimate are frustrated by the event. Not Esau but Jacob, not Ephraim but Manasseh, not Reuben

but Judah, not Aaron, the eloquent, but Moses, the slow of speech, not any of the elder-born sons of Jesse, but the stripling David, are chosen respectively to fill high places in the kingdom of God. Or again, trace the operation of the same law in the history of the faithful under the old covenant. Abraham is called from his home to inherit a land in which he finds himself a stranger and a sojourner : he receives promises for a posterity, which seems denied to him by the ordinary laws of nature ; he is ordered to slay the son miraculously given, and, in the very act of giving the death-blow to all his hopes, obtains the crowning blessing of a life-long faith. Still more remarkably is the loving irony of God's dealings with His people illustrated by the history connected with our text. The words of Jacob, which we have heard, were uttered at the point of his lowest despondency. Troubled and anxious had been the course of his life hitherto ; a youth spent in lonely exile, a long-delayed marriage with the wife of his love, a return to his native land clouded by apprehensions of Esau's anger, and disturbed in its very commencement by the fall of Dinah, and the death of Rachel : to this had succeeded the abiding trouble of Joseph's loss, and now in the very midst of the famine the means which he had taken to procure relief seem to have brought with them fresh misfortune ; Simeon is

detained in Egypt, and the condition of his release is the appearance of Benjamin before a ruler whose intentions are uncertain. Well might the patriarch say as he looked back upon the mournful past, as he gazed into the dreary future—"All these things "are against me." And yet at that very moment he was standing close upon a bright reversal of his former sorrows, a glad turning point in his sad and chequered life. A quiet evening-time of light was about to close his storm-tossed day of life, and surrounded by the love and fostering care of his favourite son, he was at length to depart in peace. Nay his very troubles had been the necessary preparation for this last haven of quiet. Joseph had, to use his own words, been sent before into Egypt to preserve life ; sent, as he says in the true spirit of faith, not so much by his envious, hard-hearted brethren, as by the merciful providence of a God, whose thoughts are not as man's thoughts, and whose footsteps are not known.

But it is time, my brethren, for us to direct upon our own life and experience the light which streams from the blessed truth we have been considering.

God's Providence is working in the short span of each human life no less surely than in the direction of the ages, and in the history of the human race. God, my brethren, does not deal with mankind in masses only ; He is not obliged, like some human

philanthropist or politician, to sacrifice to the general good the consideration of the minute details of individual cases; no, we are, each one of us, the objects of an all-penetrating, an all-watchful care, a care which extends itself to the smallest circumstances of our earthly lot—the most insignificant of the facts which make up our distinct personality. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Yes, believe it, that thou thyself art living under the very eye of thy God, that He is with thee at thy lying down, and at thy rising up, that He watches thy every thought, and knows each pulsation of thy being, that He it is who orders not only the great joys and sorrows of thy life, but what are called the accidents of thy daily existence, the trivial task, the passing conversation, the pleasant hour, the brief anxiety. One by one He counts the minutes by which thy life is told; one by one He brings to bear upon thee the circumstances, the events, the persons, which are appointed to do their part in training and exercising thee during this thy season of probation; one by one He unfolds to thee the scenes of thy life, as thou passest on from childhood to the day of thy death; everything that befals thee has its special message and purpose, and is charged with a divine import concerning thee; in everything thou mayest behold a messenger of God, sent, if thou wilt, to lead thee

in the way wherein thou shouldest go ; each bare prosaic detail of thy life, which to the eye of sense looks so utterly commonplace and familiar, thou mayest by the touch of faith convert to gold, and apply to thy soul's salvation ; be it joy or be it sorrow, be it labour or rest, be it hope or despondency, be it failure or success, be it a great matter or a small—all these things shall be not against thee, but working for thy good, if only thou art faithful to thy God in all.

Such, my brethren, is the language of faith ; but we must remember that it is of *faith* that it is the language, and not always, not perhaps generally, of sight. Appearances will often be against it, they will seem to contradict it, to give it a practical refutation. Again and again as the peculiar trials of our temperament or worldly condition press upon us, as blow succeeds blow, and the clouds return after rain, we shall be tempted to exclaim with Jacob, "All these things are against me." And this is so from the very necessity of the case ; the plan of our lives is hidden from us, it is only worked out step by step, and we who see a part only and not the whole of which it is the part, grow frightened and perplexed ; we are like those who are led along blind-folded by others, and fear to plant our steps firmly on the ground before us ; we are as travellers in a strange land who have received

directions to take a road which seems unlikely to lead to our destination. God leads His own by a way that they know not, and we, ignorant as we are of the ways of His Providence, too often take alarm, and refuse to place implicit trust in our Heavenly Guide ; faith refuses to pierce the veil of sense, and we are ready to sit down by the wayside in despair at the very moment when the towers of the heavenly city are ready to burst upon our view.

And why, my brethren, does God thus deal with us ?

First, it is for the trial of our faith. We might indeed have supposed that it was enough for us that our faith should be tried in the furnace of intellectual temptation—that in yielding a loyal assent to the mysteries of religion we should have satisfied this condition of our probation. But as a matter of fact, it is in questions of daily life and practice no less than in the submission of reason to Divine Truth, that the benediction pronounced on those who have not seen, and yet have believed, finds its fulfilment—our trial must be moral as well as intellectual. And here it is that the Providence of God tries us no less by its strangeness than by its severities. If we examine our feelings we shall I think find that what chiefly presses upon us in life is not so much the actual pain or anguish (sharp though this be) as the feeling of utter bewilder-

ment which is apt to steal over us, the inability to trace any order or design or purpose in our troubles, the apparent hiding of God's countenance in them. Suffering we could bear, but we would suffer in the light of heaven, knowing why we suffer, and the end to which our suffering is conducting us. But all this is often hidden from us at the time, hidden that we may lean more fully on our God and on the word of His promise.

And, secondly, do not the secret ways of God's Providence illustrate brightly His Divine power? He works indeed by means, but His independence of them is shown by the unexpected way in which He orders and employs them. Events which seem to be leading up to some great calamity open out and disclose a great deliverance; the sun bursts suddenly through leaden skies and threatening clouds. We in our poor human fashion fore-*cast* the future, and trace out the probable direction of our lives; and God in His mercy often disappoints as well our aspirations as our apprehensions. Out of events seeming the most adverse He brings to pass His purposes of love concerning us: out of sorrow springs joy, out of disappointment happiness, out of defeat, victory, out of death, life. Never is God nearer to his people than when He seems most completely to have left them to themselves.

And, lastly, do we not gather the oft-required

lesson of increased confidence in Him, Who is our God and our all? Often, indeed, even in this life does He allow us to see by a prophetic glimpse the mighty love by which we are upborne; how often in looking back over our life does the past melt into that perfect orb we saw not when we moved therein; how often is the crooked made straight, the rough places plain; what seemed at the time such a tangled mass of untoward events is seen to bear its proper part and office, not only in our preparation for eternity, but even in the onward movements of our earthly lot. God's mercies lose the disguises under which they encountered us; we feel that God was indeed in this or that passage of our lives, though we knew it not. And should not such experience animate us in the midst of present or future difficulties? should it not lead us to believe against all adverse appearances that the God of our past will also be the God of our future, that He will be our guide even unto death.

But, brethren, it is only when you have passed beyond that last dark mystery of death, that the full flood of light will illumine every corner of the past, and reveal in its full proportion the goodness and mercy which have followed us all the days of our life. Here we walk by faith, not by sight; here we must content to be ignorant of many of the mysteries which encompass God's ways, as well

in Providence as in Creation and Redemption ; but then in the light of God shall we see face to face ; then shall we know even as we are known. Thy present, it may be, is dark, thy future uncertain, thy past only partially illumined ; yet be strong and of a good courage. "What I do thou knowest not "now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

SERMON VIII.

SPIRITUAL REFRESHMENT.

(MID-LENT.)

PSALM XCIV. 19.

"In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Thy comforts have refreshed my soul."

ANY one, my brethren, who attentively considers the services of to-day can scarcely fail to be struck with the peculiar character which is impressed upon them. We have now reached the middle of our Lenten Fast, and on this Mid-Lent Sunday a new note seems to be struck by the Church ; in the midst of our course of penitence and self-denial we listen to-day to words of comfort and encouragement, which speak to us in the language of hope, if not of joy ; gleams of sunshine break upon our path, and the command seems to go forth to lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. In the Collect we pray that we who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comforts of God's grace may mercifully be relieved ;

the Epistle contrasts the bondage of the old Covenant with the freedom of the New, and tells us, in words which ring joyously in our ears, of the Jerusalem which is above, which is free and the mother of us all. The first lesson tells us of the feast with which Joseph, true type of our Lord, entertained those brethren who had sinned against him so deeply ; the Gospel records the feeding of the fainting multitudes in the wilderness by the power of a compassionate Saviour—symbol of the spiritual sustenance with which He sustains our drooping souls.

Fitly indeed, my brethren, was this Sunday known of old under the name of Refreshment Sunday—a sort of pause or resting-place on our journey through the forty days of Lent, a station in the wilderness, where God seems to speak to us in tones of forgiveness and comfort, lest perhaps we should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. It meets us mid-way on our road ; in view of the sins which the past weeks may have brought to our remembrance, it tells us that there is balm in Gilead ; it encourages us to go on with fresh energy during the remainder of this course of self-discipline and devotion. And if indeed we have been enabled by God's grace to draw any profitable fruit to our souls from this accepted time, this day of salvation—if the opportunities, which this season of prayer and

retirement have brought with it, have indeed been blessed to our souls, then let us on this Sunday thank God and take courage, and let us resolve to seek the Lord more earnestly and faithfully during the solemn and awful time which approaches, when the shadows of Lent will fall thicker round us until they deepen into the strange darkness of the Great Day of Atonement. But if, on the other hand, we have allowed the preceding weeks to pass away with little or nothing to mark them off from the ordinary days of our life—if there has been no increased watchfulness in prayer, no effort after self-denial, no reaching forth to a higher standard of life and practice (however accompanied by miserable defects and shortcomings),—we have now, as it were, a second day of grace opened out before us; it is not yet too late to seek and obtain the benedictions and graces which are ready to flow so abundantly into our souls: the flood-gates of the Divine Mercy are about to be opened wide in the Passion of our Redeemer; the Easter morn may yet find us nearer to instead of further from heaven and God.

The tone of the Church's Services to day being one of tenderness and encouragement, speaking to us rather of the joys and consolations of penitence than of its rigour and self-denials, it will I think be a not unprofitable subject for our meditation, if

we dwell for a short time upon the refreshments and comforts which God sends to the soul in the midst of her warfare, by which she is continually sustained in the spiritual life, and which anticipate to some extent the eternal Sabbath which remaineth for the people of God—if we dwell upon the reason of their bestowal, the possible abuses to which they are liable.

Our life here, even in its earthly aspect, is, as you know, a mingled one. We can easily see that it is not intended to be a scene of uninterrupted joy and delight, nay, not even of chastened happiness and calm satisfaction. But on the other hand there are distinct indications that God has not willed this earthly scene of probation to be without its touches of gladness and mirth. And so, for most of us at least, life is very varied in its aspect—sunshine and gloom, flower and thorn, joy and sorrow. Outward nature itself reads us the same lesson. The glad beauty of summer, the dull gloom of winter, as they succeed one another—the varied character of the days as they pass by, one with its glowing sunshine, another with its dark storms and clouds—nay, the changes that often follow upon one another within the limits of a single day, teach us to expect something analogous in the course of our own life. And is it not so, at least in the majority of instances? There may indeed be those who, clouded by the

shadow of past sin, their own or that of others, or called by our Lord to a very close conformity to His cross, pass through life in much heaviness and outward sorrow, and, it may be, with but little inward peace ; these demand our wonder and sympathy (though not our pity, for their light affliction we may not doubt is working for them a far more eternal and exceeding weight of glory,) but even these have at times their seasons of refreshing from the Lord. On the other hand, there may be some innocent and elect souls who in child-like confidence seem to pass through this earthly scene unharmed by the troubles of life, ever trustful and full of peace, presenting to our view a kind of foreshadowing of the life of the blessed in heaven ; yet even such as these, we may well believe, have at times a passing cloud which dims the brightness of the sky. But for ordinary Christians, life, both in its temporal and spiritual aspect, is full of change and variety—life is as a river, which in its course towards the ocean of eternity passes through ever-changing scenes. For a time, indeed, the state of things around us may appear fixed and unaltered, but a sudden event will change for us the whole face of life—or if no such startling incident arises, the very lapse of time, as it changes the position of everything around us, brings with it stealthily and insensibly the greatest changes of all. But the

outward changes of life are as nothing compared to the constant ebb and flow in the human soul, the seasons of exaltation and depression, of brightness and gloom, which pass across the inner life.

For as it is with the merely natural life, common to all men, so it is with the spiritual and supernatural life. Here too we have seasons of sorrow and depression, followed by seasons in which, according to the words of the Psalmist, God's comforts in an especial manner refresh our weary souls.

Mid-Lent Sunday is but a type of the Refreshment which at times comes to the soul in the midst of its conflicts and sorrows, ere it has yet attained to the rest and joy of the eternal Easter. Even in this, as in all else, our Blessed Lord condescended to be the model of the spiritual life. He refused not the ministrations of the angels at the end of the forty days' Fast, the tender love and sympathy of the quiet home at Bethany before His agony.

Let us then endeavour, by God's help, to trace some of the reasons for which He at times graciously gladdens us with the special light of his Countenance, and at the same time some of the peculiar dangers and abuses to which such seasons are liable.

And, first, all such visitations seem intended to support and cheer the spiritual life, and to restore

the drooping powers of the soul. They are as the manna, which sustains the people of God in their journey through the desert, or as that “table spread “in the wilderness” of which we have heard in the Gospel to-day, provided by the Love of our Blessed Lord lest we faint by the way. As earthly Hope is sustained and quickened by the unexpected solace which she encounters, so God has seen fit that Divine Hope should be continually fed within the souls of His servants by the comfort of the Holy Ghost, that, in the midst of the constant checks and hindrances which they meet with, they should ever and anon be encouraged to repose their whole trust and confidence in God, by the wonderful refreshments and exceeding richness of His grace. For, my brethren, let us not conceal it from ourselves, the spiritual life must ever be a combat, and complete victory will come only with death. It is a hard thing to struggle with sin within and without ; it is a hard thing to keep our eyes fixed upon God and eternity amid the many distractions and difficulties of earth ; it is a hard thing to part with that which has made for itself a home in our heart’s affections, to embrace that which our lower nature would gladly put far from it. Do not let us for a moment imagine that our religion is to be a mere matter of pious sentiments and language, of spiritual exercises which bring with them a sense

of pleasure, of outward activity in works of charity, of conscious enjoyment of the powers of the world to come. Holy Scripture speaks in very different language ; it describes the Christian life as a race which requires the most unsparing denial of self—as a warfare for which we must be prepared to forsake the dearest of earthly ties—as a wrestling with all the energies of the soul against the principalities and powers of evil. We may depend upon it that one who is conscious of no sense of effort, no difficulty, no struggle in his inner life, is as yet far from the Kingdom of God.

But the Christian's life is a strange paradox ; if his sufferings abound by Christ, so also do his consolations ; if his needs are great, so also is his strength ; his sorrows are many, so also are his joys ; even in the midst of inward and outward conflict he is taught to rejoice always ; he is troubled on every side, yet not distressed, perplexed yet not in despair, persecuted yet not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed. And there are times when in the abundance of the Divine consolation all sense of conflict and struggle is completely drowned—when the soul “satisfied with “favour” seems to rise above the mists of earth to the eternal light of God’s Presence, and to drink of the pleasures which are at His right hand for evermore—when the days of her mourning seem to be

already ended, and she seems to stand within the eternal rest of the Paradise of God. True it is that she must descend from the Mount, and return to the sin and sorrow which lie beneath ; yet the remembrance of that vision of heavenly glory will be sweet to her in the more sober times which follow, and will enable her, if need be, to take her stand beneath the Cross of her Divine Redeemer, and to share His cup of sorrows.

Secondly, we may well believe that God thus waters our souls with the dew of His blessing, to excite within us a more ardent and inextinguishable gratitude and love towards Himself, and to give us even in our earthly pilgrimage a fore-taste of the eternal blessedness of His people. For who that has thus tasted that the Lord is gracious can refrain from breaking forth into fresh songs of thanksgiving to Him from Whom proceeds every good and perfect gift ? who, as he reflects on his own sinfulness and entire unworthiness of any such marks of favour, can fail to be filled with an unspeakable sense of the wonders of Divine grace, and to refer all to the unmerited love of His Heavenly Father ? who will not endeavour to show forth his gratitude for these gracious glimpses of the heavenly Canaan, not only by words, but by a more entire dedication of body, soul and spirit to the service of Him Who declares Himself, by these convincing

proofs, to be our God and our All? And do not such seasons open out to us the infinite possibilities of bliss which lie hid in the regenerate nature of man, do they not enable us to see, though it be but through a glass darkly, something of the land which is very far off, of the King in His beauty? What may we not hope for from God in our true country, when such are the consolations with which He visits us on the road? What will be the joy of the heavenly city when such is the sweetness of our service, even as strangers and pilgrims upon earth?

But we must notice briefly some of the dangers to which these consolations expose our soul; for like every other gift of God they are liable to abuse, and they may become in the hands of the devil an instrument of our destruction.

First, we may be sure that if we feel vexed and angry at their withdrawal, like Jonah at the withering of the gourd, we are in danger of turning them into an occasion of sin. Is not God the supreme object of the soul's service and love at all times? Is He not to be served as well in joy as in sorrow, in darkness as in light? Must it not be highly displeasing to Him to see us sullen and discontented because in His Wisdom He thinks it good to allow us to walk for a season without that immediate sense of His Presence which we once enjoyed. In such matters

our true wisdom is to trust all to Him—to receive everything as from His Hand—in everything to strive to conform ourselves to His adorable Will—if He visits us with the sweetness of devotion, to thank Him for favours so far beyond our deserts—if he sends us dryness and desolation, to bless Him that He vouchsafes thus to discipline and train us for our eternal home.

For, indeed, all repining at the loss of sensible consolation proceeds from that self-love which is so constantly tyrannizing over us. It proves that we are too much inclined to serve God merely because of the delights which His service brings with it, like the Jewish multitudes of old, who followed Jesus not because their hearts were raised to God by a sense of His Divine Power, but because they did eat of the loaves and were filled. We, indeed, cry out with S. Peter as we gaze on the heavenly vision, “Lord, it is good for us to be here;” we imagine that if God would only grant us continually this liberty and gladness of heart, we should be enabled to glorify Him better than in the fires of affliction—that sadness and heaviness are but hindrances to us on our heaven-ward road; but God judges far otherwise. Surely S. John and the Blessed Virgin are nearer to Jesus as they stand at the foot of the Cross, than S. Peter as he desires to retain the glory of the Transfiguration. Just as

there is a danger lest we rest too much in God's earthly gifts, so also, in regard to His spiritual blessings, we must repose our hearts in nothing short of God Himself. It is indeed no wonder that we are unwilling to part, even for a time, with the delights which attend His service; they exceed infinitely all the joys of this world; they are more than sufficient to outweigh all human miseries and discomforts. But we have not yet attained to the rest prepared for us: there are enemies who lie waiting in our way on every side; the cries of suffering and sin ascend to heaven all around us; is it a time for us to seek great things for ourselves, to expect an uninterrupted flow of calm and happiness? Is it not possible that such satisfactions as we seek would put us off our guard, would make us careless and selfish, would unnerve the vigour of the soul's life? And is there not a very real danger lest our religion should become altogether too much a matter of the feelings—lest we measure our progress not by our conquest over the corrupt inclinations and affections of our own hearts, but by the fluctuations of our inner life? We have been speaking much of the Christian's experiences, of the consolations and joys of the Holy Spirit, and that these are very precious realities we may not doubt. But we must remember that our Christian calling has another side to it; that it includes

a life of action as well as of contemplation.

This suggests a second danger to us; for if we should find that we are beginning to test and try ourselves, not by the rule of God's commandments, but by the amount of spiritual comfort we have experienced, the clearness of our heaven-ward vision, it is time for us to beware lest, by turning that which God has given us for a means into an end, we be found at last among the number of those who, with the words, "Lord, Lord," ever on their lips, have neglected to do the things which He commands them. Let us remember that no fervour of spirit, no apparent illumination, will excuse us from the faithful discharge of the smallest, the meanest duty, which God has laid upon us: nay, if we should turn them into an excuse for allowing the weeds of sinful habits to grow up unchecked within us, or for neglecting our daily work, they will but increase our condemnation, in that while we received much of God, while we have been favoured with a sense of the blessedness of devoting ourselves to Him, we have received His grace in vain, we have despised the opportunities which He has given us of serving Him, we have allowed our hearts idly to delight themselves in that most unprofitable of all employments, the indulgence of good desires which are not translated into action.

Let us beware, then, lest, in one of these ways

we turn the things that should have been for our wealth into an occasion of falling, lest either by murmuring at the absence of these heavenly refreshments, or resting too much in their presence, we abuse and pervert to our downfall these loving gifts of our Heavenly Father.

In conclusion, it seems necessary to add one word of warning to those among us, if there should be any, whose hearts tell them that they have, as yet, neither part nor lot in the heritage of God's children, to whom the joys and the perils of the spiritual life are alike unknown, who, though they have their full share in the vicissitudes of the natural life, though they know what it is to joy and to sorrow, to hope and to fear, to experience heaviness and consolation about the things of this world, experience no corresponding alternations in their inner life, know nothing of the sorrows of penitence, of the joys of conscious communion with God, of the hope of heaven, of the fear of hell, of the comfort of the Holy Ghost, of the temporary desolations with which God afflicts for their good His faithful children.

There are—we cannot conceal it from ourselves—some in whom all spiritual sensibilities seem to be dead and buried. They are keen and eager about the things of this life ; they mourn and rejoice over its various changes and chances. But as for the

interests of their immortal souls, their nearness to or distance from God, the witness of the Holy Spirit within them, for all these things they exhibit a profound unconcern. Let not such imagine that their freedom from spiritual anxieties and pleasures is a thing to be envied or desired, the result of an even temper of mind, a contented disposition, something to be preferred to the troubles and conflicts of those who are seeking to live above the world, and the things of the world.

There is a freedom which is in fact the bitterest bondage, a peace which is no peace, a peace such as that of the strong man armed keeping his palace—Satan enthroned in the soul, and lording it over all its desires and affections with an absolute dominion.

Better the struggling and striving of a life-time than such a peace as this, better, far better, the most troubled, desolate, sin-harassed life of one of God's children, than the false security and confidence of one who cares for none of these things. It is indeed a fearful thing to walk lightly through life, without a thought or care for those things which in a few years we shall find to be the only abiding realities, to discover when too late that we have neglected that on which hung an eternity of blessedness or woe. Miserable and profitless exchange indeed would it be, my brethren, if a

man could for a life of unmixed happiness here below barter his heavenly birth-right—bitter and unavailing repentance would it bring when the pleasures of time were for ever passed away, and the endless years of misery lay before him.

But you know well that the case does not even stand thus—that a life devoted to the world by no means involves satisfaction with the world—that it is full of drawbacks and disappointments of every kind—that its pleasures, even at their brightest, fail to satisfy, and soon pall upon us—that while they last they are at the mercy of every passing breath—that pain of body and anguish of mind will at times assert their claim over us—that we must, whether we will or no, submit to a considerable number of crosses and self-denials of every kind, and that, too, even in order to reach the satisfaction we propose to ourselves, and in which we place all our hope.

Will you not then resolve this day to cast in your lot with those who have resolved by God's grace to give up all for Him, to devote themselves to Him, and Him only? will you not ask Him to receive you, though it be at the eleventh hour, to work in His vineyard—very gladly to spend and be spent in His service?—will you not at this blessed season entreat Him to pardon your past sin, negligence, and ignorance, and welcome you as

returning prodigals with the arms of His love. He is waiting to be gracious: His heart yearns with compassion over you. And He is, as I have said, no harsh and austere master you are invited to serve; even in the midst of penitence and struggle with sin, you will be possessed of a peace to which you have been hitherto a stranger: the light of heaven will shine brighter and brighter upon your path, God will reveal to you even in this life, some foretaste of the eternal pleasures to which He is calling you: you shall know what it is with joy to draw water out of the wells of salvation. And still the best remains behind; for when the long conflict of life is ended, and Jesus has won the victory within you, when in the presence of men and angels you are caught up to the throne of God and enter into the vast ocean of His love, you shall confess that, happy as you have been in serving Him on earth, bright as have been your anticipations of future glory, "the half has not been told you," and comparing your experiences of the unsatisfying delusive joys of this world with the gladness of the heavenly marriage Feast, you shall exclaim, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse, but Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

SERMON IX.

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE ATONEMENT. (PASSION SUNDAY.)

LAMENTATIONS I. 12.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

WE have already advanced far, my brethren, in the sacred season of Lent, and in the services of to-day we may I think see some traces of that great mystery which we shall so soon be called upon to contemplate—the Passion of the Son of God. Already the Church seems to be making her preparations for the most solemn period of her year; already she takes us by the hand, and begins to conduct us along the road which leads to Calvary—to the foot of the Cross. In the first lesson this morning we commenced a new book of Holy Scripture—Exodus—and I need not remind you that the Exodus of God's ancient people from the land of Egypt is in its might and its marvels a wonderful type of that still greater deliverance effected for us from a bondage and a yoke more galling than that of Egypt. Jesus Christ about to offer Himself for our salvation seems

to take upon His lips those words which we have lately heard—"I have surely seen the affliction of "my people which is in Egypt, and have heard "their cry by reason of their taskmasters : for I "know their sorrows ; and I am come down to "deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, "and to bring them up out of that land into a good "land, and a large, unto a land flowing with milk "and honey." Yes, the Divine Redeemer is about to deliver the slaves of Satan, to be Himself the Paschal Lamb whose blood sprinkled on our thresholds averts the wrath of the destroying Angel, to lead us through the baptismal waters of the Red sea, to guide us through the wilderness of life and the dark valley of death to the fair and fruitful Canaan, our true native country, whither all loyal hearts are yearning. Again in the Epistle for this Sunday the Passion casts forward its shadow on our Lenten journey : Christ is set before us as a High Priest of good things to come, and the efficacy of His atoning Blood is contrasted with the partial and briefly cleansing conveyed by the blood of goats and calves under the old Covenant. In the Gospel our Lord by an unequivocal confession of His Divinity (the words "I am," which He uses, precisely answering to the great Name, "I am that I am," & the first lesson) provokes the hostility of the Jews to an open attack on His Person. This

ushers in the outrages so soon to be inflicted on Him in the Garden and the Judgment Hall.

To-day, then, we enter upon the contemplation of that vast and inexhaustible subject—the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Let us, therefore, with Moses take off the shoes from our feet ; for we already stand on holy ground, and it is only with the deepest reverence and awe that we should venture to draw nigh to this great sight to which the Lord is calling us. May the Blessed Spirit take indeed of the things of Christ and shew them unto us, in this solemn season which approaches ; may He enable us to look with faith upon Him whom by our sins we have pierced, and, thus looking, to find peace and rest for our soul !

It is not to any special point in the Passion of our Blessed Lord to which I propose to call your attention this day, my brethren, but rather to the subject considered as a whole—to the great fact that our Lord's human life of three and thirty years was crowned and completed by an unparalleled act of self-sacrifice and suffering.

The Passion of our Saviour may be truly said to be the great centre of the world's life : to it all previous history led ; from it all that is valuable in the life of man flows. It is the wonder of angels, the joy of saints, the hope of sinners. In it is manifested the uttermost expression of the love of

the Eternal Father, the most intense act of humiliation and obedience on the part of the Son made man. It is the strength of the suffering, the example of the self-denying, the refuge of the disconsolate. But it is something more than all this, something without which it would, though still invested with a moral grandeur, be destitute of all its real power upon the lives and consciences of men. It is the one great act of Atonement, whereby God the Father hath reconciled to Himself the whole Creation, and hath made nigh by the Blood of Christ those who once were afar off—alienated from the Divine Life.

Those sufferings, which we, at the distance of more than eighteen centuries, are now invited once more to look upon, were the sufferings of the God-man—endured indeed in our human nature, but endured by One who was not simply man, but a Divine Person, and thus acquiring a far-reaching, an incalculable value. Why indeed it was necessary for the Son thus to suffer in the nature which He had assumed, why it was necessary that His blood should be poured forth upon the Altar of the Cross, that His sacred Head should be bowed in death, is a matter too high for us to enquire into; whether our redemption could have been effected by anything short of this, by any less painful road, it were presumptuous to enquire: it is sufficient for us to know

as a matter of fact that so it seemed good in the sight of the ever-blessed Trinity—that the Eternal Father so loved the world that He spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all; that our Blessed Saviour willingly offered Himself as a Sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. A thick veil is spread over those sufferings; not without reason do the ancient Greek Liturgies speak of the “unknown sufferings” of our Lord’s Agony. The special mystery of the Passion consists in this—that in and by it was being accomplished the reconciliation of man to God, of God to man. The sacrifices of the old Law—the bleeding victims offered on Jewish altars—had been teaching the minds of the chosen people that without shedding of blood is no remission; and even among the heathen, in spite of errors and corruptions, the institution of sacrifice, rooted in men’s hearts as by an universal instinct, bore witness to the one great Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, one day to be offered on Calvary.

As you meditate then upon the Saviour’s sufferings learn to look upon them, not simply as sufferings unexampled in love and intensity, but as invested with a meritorious value, as endured in some hidden mystery for your salvation, as the Atonement whereby the means of grace and the hope of glory were secured for your soul.

And having said thus much generally on our Lord's Passion, and the aspect under which we should contemplate it, let me call your attention to the greatness of that sorrow which He endured for us. His voice seems to sound in our ears, and call aloud to the careless populations of the earth, "Is "it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold "and see if there be any sorrow like unto My "sorrow."

And first, consider the greatness and intensity of the bodily sufferings endured for us by our Blessed Lord. Throughout the whole course of His life He had endured much in the body for love of us ; He had been born in the rude stable of a country inn, and His cradle had been a manger ; He had been hurried into a strange land in the dead of the night to escape the wrath of a cruel king ; He had lived for thirty years in toil and poverty at Nazareth ; during His three years' ministry He had prayed in the cold midnight air on lonely mountain sides ; He had known what it was to want His daily bread ; He often had not, as He tells us, where to lay His head at night ; but all these hardships and privations were but the faint fore-runners of that mighty flood of tribulation which burst upon His Head in the closing scene of His earthly life. The Gospels, which often relate so briefly the events of the Ministry, become exact and circumstantial as they

set forth to us point by point the details of our Lord's last hours upon earth. It is as though the Holy Ghost intended us to dwell with loving accuracy upon each separate circumstance in the Divine Passion, as though the teaching of the Lord's life culminated in its crowning act, and gathered therein a fresh lustre and significance. A quiet hush precedes the tumultuous scenes of the Good Friday. The Lord has brought together into the upper chamber His chosen few : the Holy Sacrament has been instituted : not even the presence of the traitor is there to disturb the perfect peace and confidence : the tender, thoughtful words of parting are uttered by the Saviour, the great Intercessory prayer is poured into the ears of the Father, and then He passes on into the familiar garden, which is to be the scene of His apprehension. There He is stirred with an anguish of soul which by a secret sympathy affects even His bodily frame, and forces from Him great drops of blood falling down to the ground : soon Judas arrives with his band, and the Saviour is roughly bound, and hurried before the tribunals of Annas and Caiaphas : and then follows that long weary night of insult, reproach, and accusation—the condemnation, the blows, the buffeting, the spitting. At the dawn of day our blessed Lord, weak and weary with the ignominious usage of the past night, is dragged before the Roman Governor, and falsely

accused ; thence He is sent to Herod, and by him and his men-of-war is set at nought. Again He is led back to Pilate, who, in the vain hope of releasing Him, causes Him to undergo the cruel punishment of a Roman scourging, and thus only inflicts upon Him additional suffering ; at last Pilate is overcome, and gives sentence that it shall be as they required ; and now the malice of men and the hatred of the evil one are let loose upon the innocent form of the Son of man : the brutal soldiers of the Roman Governor are allowed to vent their coarse mockery upon the Incarnate God, to cover Him with scarlet robes, to place a crown of thorns upon His Sacred Head, to place in His feeble Hand a reed, to bow the knee in derision before Him, at whose Divine Presence heaven and earth will one day flee ; and then again they clothe Him in His own garments, and place the heavy cross on His wounded shoulders, and lead Him forth along the way of sorrows, followed by the wailing women of Jerusalem : Calvary is at length reached, though it seems that the Saviour had already fainted beneath the weight of the cross : the stupefying potion is refused, and then the exhausted Body of Jesus is placed upon the hard bed of the Cross, and great nails are ruthlessly driven into His Sacred Hands and Feet : the Cross is raised in mid-air, and then for at least three weary

hours He hangs suspended between heaven and earth, His limbs racked with anguish, His throat parched with thirst, His eyes filled with tears, His ears filled with the revilings of those who stand beneath, yea, even of those who hang in suffering by His side. He is made "as a worm, and no man—
"the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people." He endures the punishment and the shame of a common malefactor; He dies a death accursed by His own nation. Surely such a death were fearful enough for any of the sons of men to endure; but ask yourselves, my brethren, Who is it that suffers thus? who is it that endures this sorrow like unto none other? It is your God, Who has descended from the highest heaven; your God, Who has made Himself lower than the Angels for your sake—Who has taken to Himself a human body and soul, that with that body and soul He may suffer for your sins. And surely we do well to remember that the great mystery of the Incarnation must always affect to an incalculable degree the mystery of the Passion. In themselves, the bodily sufferings of Jesus, unspeakably great though they were, would not differ materially from those endured by multitudes of the martyrs, who for His sake have gladly laid down their lives in the midst of torments. But those sufferings were endured in a body which, though like our own, was conceived

without spot of sin and untainted by the slightest stain of actual guilt, a body, too, which was united by a union inconceivably close and intimate to the Godhead ; and hence it has been held that our Lord's capacity of suffering was far greater than that possessed by ordinary men, that His sinless humanity united to His Divinity had an exquisite sensibility of pain unknown to us, even as we find by experience among ourselves that the more delicately-organized frame is the more keenly alive to the assaults of pain.

But if our Lord's bodily sufferings were so great, what shall we say next of the great mental anguish by which they were accompanied. Throughout the whole course of His life on earth Calvary had ever been before Him as His journey's end; truly His grief had ever been in His sight. From our eyes the future is in mercy veiled, but to the Omniscient soul of our Lord every detail in his last agony was known long before. As He moved up and down among men, as He shared in their joys and griefs, He ever bore about with Him the consciousness of the coming conflict; as He walked through the streets of Jerusalem, as He gazed upon the faces of the Jewish rulers, He was reminded of the scenes by which He was so soon to be surrounded. Thus had the Passion been ever casting forward its dark shadow on His path, and burdening His soul with

the vision of its exceeding bitterness, and when the actual moment arrived what fear and horror of thick darkness falls upon Him ! As He enters into the garden His soul becomes exceeding sorrowful, even unto death : the powers of darkness array themselves against Him ; the deep waters come in, all God's billows and waves pass over His head. Whether it was the anticipation of approaching suffering, and the horror of death, or a deep mental depression which settled upon Him, or the nearness of evil spirits, or, added to all these, the weight of our sins, and the thought of the finally impenitent, which bowed Him to the earth, we may not exactly define : this much at least is certain, that an anguish of mind, far exceeding that experienced by any among us, took possession of our Blessed Saviour, and caused Him to offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.

And again, observe how the human love and sympathy of the Redeemer were continually wounded throughout His Passion : one of His chosen twelve betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies : His own people the Jews delivered Him to the Gentiles : His own disciples forsook Him and fled. He had to endure the pain of inflicting sorrow on the heart of His Blessed Mother, and the faithful women—a pain far keener than that of enduring sorrow to an unselfish nature. He had to bear all the bitterness

of becoming an object of scorn and hatred to the multitude. And as the soul is higher than the body, so the mental sufferings of our Lord in His Passion far exceeded those of His Body. Again, we know that capacity of mental suffering is proportioned to the nobility of the mind that suffers ; how infinite then must have been the possibilities of mental distress which lay hid within the nature of Him who was both God and man !

But there is yet a deeper recess of mental agony into which the human soul of Jesus entered; spiritual distress is the bitterest form of our earthly trial, and it could have been nothing less than the extremest kind of spiritual distress which drew from the lips of the suffering Saviour that exceeding bitter cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou ‘forsaken Me?’” We can bear much, nay, everything, when God sustains us ; but to suffer, and to feel that God abandons us in our suffering—this is indeed to taste all the bitterness of death—it is the nearest approach to the sufferings of the lost which could be made by a soul in union with God.

Thus, brethren, I have briefly touched upon the outlines of that vast subject which is about to be proposed for our meditation. In conclusion, I will but suggest one or two practical lessons for ourselves.

The Passion suggests to us, I think, two main points—the Love of God, and the sin of man.

1. The Love of God. The Love of God is displayed to us in Creation, in the beauty and variety even of this fallen world, in the wonderful adaptation of means to ends ; it is displayed in the daily providence of Him by whom the ravens are fed no less than empires sustained ; it is displayed in the course of the world's history, in the gradual progress of each human life ; but nowhere is the Love of God set forth to us in so astonishing a manner as on the Cross. The suffering Form which hangs thereon is that of our God who has assumed our human flesh, and in that flesh is enduring unexampled agonies—agonies endured for us sinners, yea, for those very men who take Him and nail Him to the tree ; no compulsion, no solicitation, but an impulse of pure love has prevailed upon Him to undertake this extreme humiliation, to undergo this sorrow of sorrows. As we gaze upon His uplifted form we know not whether to wonder more at His Love or His sufferings ; for He suffers not in indignation, nor even in mere patience and resignation, but in the fervour of a Divine Charity.

“ Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown ?”

2. Again, brethren, the Cross of Christ is the true

measure of sin. Did God suffer thus for sin? Could nothing less than this atone for it? What then must be the deadly, the unspeakably awful character of that of which we are accustomed to think so carelessly. Even the lighter forms of sin—as men call them—acquire a terrible complexion when they are brought beneath the shadow of the Cross. See then, that in thought, and word, and deed we hate that which caused Him such exceeding grief: let us look to it that in the Passion Season which approaches we search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord who has bought us; let us cast ourselves at the foot of His Cross, and pour out before Him the plague of our own heart: let us confess to Him the sinful past, and resolve for the future to give ourselves to Him who died for us.

Brethren, the goodness of the Lord yet calleth you to repentance. The efficacy of Christ's Precious Blood is yet within your reach; the fountain opened for sin and all uncleanness is still open to you. But there must be no delay: multitudes who with us passed through last Lent have been hurried out of the world, many, it is to be feared, still in their sins; to-day, then, while it is yet called to-day, return to the Lord who has bought you; look unto Him, who hangs on Calvary's Cross, and remember that His Love is mightier than your sin, that stronger is He who is with you than he who is

against you. He only asks for your heart : for it is
for love of you that He thus suffers.

“ O Love of God, O sin of man,
In this dread act your strength is tried,
And victory remains with love,
For He, our Lord, is crucified.”

SERMON X.

THE TEARS OF JESUS.

(PALM SUNDAY.)

S. LUKE xix. 41.

"And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it."

TO-DAY, my brethren, we commemorate the triumphal entry of our Blessed Lord into Jerusalem. It is, as you know, called Palm Sunday from the circumstance that the crowd which accompanied Him on that occasion testified their joy by cutting down palm branches from the trees on the wayside, and strewing them in His path. For the moment the world seemed to go after Him. The sunlight seems to break once upon the Redeemer's road, ere the thick clouds gather in, and the great storm of the Passion breaks upon His head. The brief triumph of this morning does but usher in the week of sorrows—it is the strange, incongruous prelude to the scenes upon which we shall be called to meditate during this Holy week : the Hosannas which sound

in our ears to-day will soon be exchanged for the fierce cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

"And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it."

Many are the thoughts which these words call up within us—may He help us to meditate upon them aright, so that we may enter on the celebration of these solemn days with serious and penitent hearts!

And, first, our Lord by His tears over Jerusalem proclaims to us the duty of looking at the things of this world in their true light, of estimating all that surrounds us, not as it appears to the hope, the fear, the enthusiasm, the pride of many, but as it is viewed in the sight of God, whose judgment shall alone stand, when the false standards and false excitements of the moment have passed for ever away. His tears speak to us the same lesson which He elsewhere taught in words, "*Judge not after the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*" For, as I said, there was apparently little to draw forth the tears of our Blessed Lord at that moment. He was entering Jerusalem in triumph; the palm branches were waving in front of Him; the Hosannas were rending the air; as they advanced with measured tread the whole multitude of the disciples were praising God for all the wonderful works that they had seen, saying, "*Blessed be the King that cometh in the Name of the Lord: peace*

"in heaven, and glory in the highest." And now, as the road reveals to Him the Holy City—there seems little in that spectacle of beauty to call forth tears from Him. If you or I had been there we should not have been likely to weep (at least they would not have been tears of sorrow) at such a moment.

And is it not so now, my brethren. Do we not exult and rejoice in things, and persons, and scenes which would call forth only tears from our Saviour? Do we not love external beauty—even where that beauty is found joined with the ruins which made our Saviour suffer? do we not feel a sort of pride in the greatness and glory of our country, without staying to consider whether or no the festering sore of iniquity be not eating away her true life?—or, to come nearer home, do we not feel what we call a pardonable pride in the exploits and successes of those who are near and dear to us, without troubling ourselves about their condition in the sight of God? are we not more anxious that our children should succeed in life than that their souls should be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus? are we not much more excited and disappointed about the things of earth than we are affected by our spiritual interests? do we not yield a silent homage to rank, and wealth, and fashion, and intellect, and display such a keen appreciation of

them that we are ready to sacrifice our soul's good—if not our salvation—for any one of them? The world worships success; but success calls forth the tears of our Lord, because He sees the true hollowness, the utter unreality of that which appeareth but for a little while, and then vanisheth away. All that is sinful, and opposed to God, will contain within it the seeds of its own destruction; however fair and pleasant to the eye of man, it is surely doomed to destruction, and calls forth tears from that God who even now sees the armies of wrath gathering round it, and the long-delayed vengeance ready to lay it even with the ground. Oh that we may strive to see things in their true light—that is, in the light of the eternity in which we shall soon find ourselves! oh that we may estimate them, not by the standards of sense and time, but in the true balance of God's unerring judgment!

And, secondly, we see, as from other passages of Holy Scripture, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, in that sin has the power of calling forth tears from the Saviour in the midst of so much exultation and beauty. He wept at the grave of Lazarus, not so much for His friend, whom He was about to restore to life, as for the sin which had brought the sad fact of death into the world; He wept in Gethsemane because He was overwhelmed with the sins of mankind; and so He weeps on the Mount

of Olives because He is gazing on a city steeped in sin, and doomed to the destruction which waits on sin.

Ah ! my brethren, nothing is so truly mournful as sin. It is the great evil of life ; neither poverty, nor sickness, nor slanderous words, nor the contempt of the world, have any real sting in them apart from this. Take sin away, and the world becomes a Paradise. Take sin away, and the lives of the unfortunate are filled with happiness. It is sin which has cast a blight over existence on every side of us : trace each form of suffering and sorrow around you to its ultimate source, and you will find that source to be sin. The labour which oppresses, the disease which makes the head sick and the heart faint, the mental anguish which crushes out joy—all these have their origin in sin. Sin, my brethren, surrounds us on every side : it is the very atmosphere in which we breathe : it has made itself a home in every heart. And hence it is that, in this life at least, we can never form a true estimate of sin ; we can never see it in its true proportions. The sight of a great and beautiful city awakens in us pride or joy ; it called forth from the Saviour tears of sorrow. For He looked below the surface of things, and He knew that large masses of men gather around themselves gross forms of evil, that the cry of a great city provokes God continually.

But the estimate which our Lord forms of sin is very different from that of mankind in general.

For there are some who openly glory in sin, who delight in it, who pursue it even to their temporal as well as their eternal ruin. With an incredible infatuation they pursue that which must be the source of misery to themselves as well as to others, they encourage others in sin, they not only do wickedness, but have pleasure in them that do it. "*Fools,*" we read, "make a mock at sin."

In a Christian congregation, indeed, one would hope that there are none of this character—that at least all who are present would acknowledge that sin is a thing to be avoided, that it is loathsome, that it is not to be mentioned except with abhorrence. And no doubt, brethren, you would all instinctively shrink from any coarse and palpable form of evil: yet we must not think ourselves altogether pure even in this respect. How comes it that even in respectable society the sin of drunkenness, which S. Paul tells us shuts out a man from God's kingdom, is sometimes made the subject of laughter, that its manifestations are described with a smile, that a deadly sin, which should, if we viewed it rightly, make us shudder with fear, should be the occasion of flippant mirth? Whence that practical toleration of other forms of sensuality, those scarcely veiled allusions to those things of which

it is a shame even to speak? whence those sneers directed against those who are aiming at a high standard in religious things, that excessive dread of zeal in the things of the Lord, that studied depreciation of the character and motives of those who by their lives rebuke the world around them? Whence is it that men encourage each other in laxity and self-indulgence, that they are secretly glad when they can induce their neighbour to adopt their own tone, to follow their own example?

Alas! brethren, there are many who come to Church, Sunday after Sunday, and even approach the Holy Communion, and yet know nothing of their own hearts, and the deadly poison of unrepented sin, which dwells within them, and the real peril in which their souls are placed. They seem to have no idea that sin is indeed the master-evil of life, that to contend with it should be their daily, hourly business. They have, perhaps, been wild and careless in their youth, and there may be deeds in their life which they would blush to have generally known by their fellow-men at least, but they have outgrown these, they have become respected and useful members of society, their moral, yea, and even their religious character, is unimpeachable. And so they think that the past is buried in God's sight, as it is in their own and that of the world around them; they do not

consider that those past sins, unrepented, unforgiven, will confront them immediately when they enter into God's Presence, and are waiting on the other side of the grave to drag them down to eternal punishment. And in the meantime they do not think themselves to be sinners, only because they have no adequate idea of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. They allow themselves habitually in irregularities of thought and conduct, any one of which would cause grief and shame to God's children—evil tempers, angry and uncharitable words, envious thoughts, selfish actions. To such I would say, contemplate to-day your Lord's tears, and ask the reason of them, and remember that the Saviour who weeps over sinners is also the Judge Who pronounces their irrevocable condemnation.

And may we all, brethren, after our measure learn among the lessons of this Holy Week the true nature and evil of sin. Come here, as you have opportunity, day by day, and take your stand beneath the Cross of Calvary, and as you gaze upon that pale and bleeding Form extended thereon, God grant that you may feel that it was your individual sin,

“ As though no other sin there were,
Which was to Him who bears the world
A load which He could scarcely bear.”

SERMON XI.

EASTER JOY THROUGH CHRISTIAN SORROW.

(FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.)

S. JOHN XX. 20.

"Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

A WEEK, my brethren, has passed away since the Church roused us on the morning of Easter Day, with the joyful shout, "The Lord is risen." A week has passed since we sprang at one bound from the depth of our Redeemer's agony, and the gloom of His grave, to the bright vision of His resurrection and the glad Alleluias of the Paschal season. And now on this eighth day we renew, as it were, the triumph of that day of days ; again we meet within the sanctuary to offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and tell out with gladness the marvellous deliverance which the Lord hath wrought for His people ; again we rejoice in the day which the Lord hath made ; we celebrate the birth-day of the New Creation, the restoration of humanity through the victory of the Second

Adam, the glorious harvest of our future inheritance. Yes, on this Low Sunday, as it has been called, Low only when compared with the unrivalled glory of the Feast of Feasts, we seem to live again in the atmosphere of joy which the Easter Sun shed around our path. Once more we stand beside the open sepulchre ; the glad words again ring in our ears, "He is not here, but is risen ;" the glorious certainty of the Resurrection of Jesus, the foundation and crown of our Christian Faith, is witnessed to our soul with power ; we feel that new vigour has been added to the spiritual life of the Christian Church by this fresh celebration of the highest mysteries of our religion—that grace is upon all who have lovingly and earnestly sought Him whom their soul loveth.

Manifold, indeed, are the blessings and joys with which Easter enriches the souls of those who during the sorrows and self-denials of the past Lent have endeavoured to follow their Blessed Lord in His Temptation and Sufferings ; they know whom they have believed ; they are convinced that it is not in vain, that they have made an effort, (however slight and unworthy,) to give themselves to more careful self-examination, more earnest prayer, more watchful denial of self, that they have attended, according to their opportunities, the services to which they were summoned in the House of Prayer ;

they have, it may be, tasted in their Easter joy and their Easter Communion that the Lord is gracious ; He has met them with His own merciful “ All hail,” dispelled their timid doubts, encouraged their failing faith, strengthened them in the way of salvation, pointed them to the joys of that eternal Easter, to which He is calling them after the brief Lent of this life is past and over. As to-day, then, renews and sums up the Easter triumph, so also the services of the Church contain echoes of her festal rejoicings. The proper preface, appointed in the office of Holy Communion for Easter Day and the seven days following, has on this octave or eighth day of the Festival, sounded once more in our ears ; the collect recalls the language of our Easter anthem ; in the Epistle the victory of Christian Faith is set before us, and the true life which is to be found only in union with our risen Lord ; and in the Holy Gospel is related that eventide appearance of our blessed Lord to the assembled Apostles, the last of those manifestations which on the first Lord’s Day shone out as stars one by one on the troubled night of clouded faith and disappointed hopes. The Lord stands once more in the midst of His little flock and breathes upon them the blessing of peace. He gives them that high and mysterious commission, the virtue of which reaches through the long ages of the Church

to the great Judgment Day, sending them forth with a mission which He compares to nothing less than His own Incarnation amongst men, and with the grace of the Holy Spirit infused into their souls.

Let us dwell for a short time upon the exceeding joy which filled the hearts of the Apostles as they welcomed back their well-beloved Lord into their company, joy greater than that with which the aged Jacob and his sons received their long-lost Joseph, or even than that with which His blessed mother and foster-father had at our Lord's first Passover found their Son in the Temple after their three days' search.

The joy of the Apostles in the Resurrection of their Lord was proportionate to their sorrow in the Passion. No greater contrast can well be conceived than that between the feelings of the Apostles on the morning and the evening of the first Easter Day. Truly of that Day it might be said, “At evening “time it shall be light.”

Faint rumours, half-believed, half-distrusted, had reached them at intervals during the day ; S. Peter and S. John had been summoned to the sepulchre in the early morning by the message of Mary Magdalene, that the Lord's Body had been removed ; they had seen the careful and orderly arrangement of the linen, in which those holy limbs had been

enfolded, and the loving heart of S. John seems to have had some intuition of the truth ; but nothing further was visible ; the Apostles returned with tidings sufficient to create curiosity, possibly alarm, but certainly not enough to dispel the sadness which brooded over the little band of believers. Then followed the loving manifestation of our Lord to the penitent Magdalene, who, unable to quit the spot where all her hope and love were centred, had remained behind at the sepulchre weeping ; she hastened to the Apostles, the first Evangelist of the Resurrection, but their hearts were drowned in sorrow, they may possibly have attributed the vision of the Lord Jesus to the effect of an over-eager and excited imagination, at any rate they believed her not. Nor did the glad tidings brought by the holy women, who had approached the sepulchre with spices, who had seen the vision of angels, and on their return had been met by our Lord Himself, obtain more ready credence from them ; their words, S. Luke tells us, " seemed to them as 'idle tales.' " For men are forward to believe things which bring with them only a surface joy ; the news that hopes on which they have staked their very existence are completely crowned, they do not dare to trust.

On the afternoon of the same day two of the disciples left the city for a sad and quiet walk to

Emmaus. They were talking together of the events of the Holy Week—of what else could they talk? But they were gloomy and dispirited; they had trusted, and, as it seemed, been disappointed; it was now the third day, and nothing had happened to convince them of the truth of our Lord's mission; they mentioned indeed, to the stranger who joined them, the vision of angels reported by the holy women, but in tones which betrayed their own distrust. That stranger was, as we know, in the breaking of bread suddenly revealed to them as their own Lord, and as suddenly withdrawn from their gaze. In the joy of that moment they instantly rose, and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven and others gathered together, and prepared to anticipate them with their joyful news. The Lord had actually appeared to one of their number. "The Lord is risen indeed," they were exclaiming, "and hath appeared to Simon." And now the glad tidings which had been flowing in from so many quarters during the course of the day with ever-increasing clearness, like the streaks of light in the East which herald the rising sun, were to be confirmed beyond the shadow of doubt by the vision of the Sun of Righteousness Himself.

In their timidity and apprehension of the hostile Jews around them they had fastened the doors of the chamber in which they were assembled, and were

even now discussing the strange and exciting events of the day, when, passing through the closed doors as He had in the early morning passed through the sealed stone of His sepulchre, that same Lord who had so lately vanished from the sight of the two disciples at Emmaus, stood in the midst of them, and saluted them with the gracious words, "Peace be unto you." But, as we learn from S. Luke's Gospel, the shock of His Presence was almost too sudden for them ; with the natural and instinctive dread with which we see one before us whom we had thought of as dead, they are terrified and affrighted, and suppose that they are looking only on our Lord's disembodied spirit returning for a moment from the mysterious regions of the dead. Our Lord with His usual love and compassion seeks to re-assure them, "Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" He invites them to handle His Sacred Body to convince themselves that it is no phantom which is before them ; He shows them the wounds which He had received in His Hands and Feet during the late agony of the Crucifixion, those wounds from which some at least among them had seen the Precious Blood falling drop by drop to the earth during the long bitter hours of the Good Friday ; He displays to them that pierced side, wounded by the soldier's lance. And when, even now, they believe not for joy and

wonder, He finally convinces them by eating in their presence, and thus affording an undoubted proof of the substantiality of that Body which they see before them.

There was no longer any room for doubt : their eyes saw, their hands handled once more, the Word of Life. It was indeed He, their Lord and their God, the same who had first called them to forsake all and follow Him, the same who had chosen them to be with Him during His three year's ministry, who had drawn them to Himself with the "cords of "a man, with bands of love"—with whom they had walked on the shore of the Galilean lake and passed over its waters, for whose sake they had been content to hear the reproach and reviling of men, whose perfect example they had observed with ever-deepening reverence, whose mysterious and hidden nature had been gradually impressing itself on their awe-struck minds. Yes, it was He, the same Lord who had eaten with them that last sorrowful supper, who had led them forth to Gethsemane with earnest words of comfort and exhortation, whom, but two days ago, they had seen hanging on the Cross, and laid still and lifeless in the Grave. O joyful sight, which more than repaid the sad aching agony of the last few hours ; they had sown in tears and now (oh, how quickly !) they were reaping in joy. Had He not told them that it

would be even so ? Had He not many times over spoken of that Resurrection, which was to crown all His ignominies and sufferings ? Had He not forewarned them of His temporary withdrawal in the Passion, and at the same time promised that their sorrow should be turned into joy, that He would see them again, and that their heart should rejoice ? But His words had been blotted out from their minds by the harrowing scenes which had followed ; their faith, their hope, if not their love, had yielded under the pressure ; the hatred of the Jews had seemed to have its way, and to work its own will ; death, the great inevitable fact against which it is so hopeless to rebel, had seemed to close all ; the stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre might well have appeared to bury behind it the eager longings of their past enthusiasm ; it was then a dream after all—that vision of a higher life which had opened out before them : the hoped-for deliverance had not been wrought : their future seemed a blank ; and there was the busy, unsympathizing, self-satisfied world around them eager to mock, perhaps to persecute them, for their allegiance to a lost cause, their loyalty to a murdered Master. No wonder then that in the revulsion of feeling with which they hailed the Presence of the Risen Lord their hearts should be flooded with strange joy ; no wonder that they

should scarcely dare to believe that the night of their heaviness had been turned into a morning of such surpassing gladness—that after all they had been right in trusting Him through life to death—that all the power and malice of His enemies had been in vain—that He, their beloved Lord, so lately scourged, mocked, crucified, buried, had loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it, and in the same Body, now Risen and Glorified, was standing before them ready to crown their faith, to dissipate their fears, to direct and counsel their future. Then, indeed, “were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.”

Brethren, what is their joy to us, and what Easter lessons does it set before us? The Church of God has now put off the garb of humiliation and penitence, and clothed herself with holy gladness, even as the earth around us is once more arraying herself in her robe of vernal triumph. We are passing through the forty days of Rejoicing, which succeed the forty days during which we have followed our Lord into the wilderness of the Temptation. Those who have gone on their way weeping, bearing forth good seed, even carrying the Lord’s Sacred Body to the Tomb, the true corn of wheat cast into the ground, have come again with joy, bearing the sheaves of the Resurrection harvest. The dark, starless, tempest-tossed night of the

Passion has been succeeded by the brilliant cloudless sky of the Easter morning. And is not this a true type of the way in which God deals with human souls in this life—out of darkness bringing light, out of heaviness comfort, out of sorrow joy, out of death life?

Abraham's faith is sorely tried ere it is crowned; Joseph is raised from the dungeon to be governor over the land of Egypt; the long journey through the wilderness precedes the entrance into the Promised Land; the way of sorrows and the cross is the necessary prelude to the session at God's Right Hand. And so it is not until the Christian has passed through fire and water that he is brought forth into a wealthy place. This you know is true of our life considered as a whole; it is, as compared with the life which is to come, a time of probation and trial. God is leading us all the way, as we travel through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan, to humble us and to prove us, to know what is in our hearts, whether we will keep His Commandments or no.

But our whole life with its final issues is constantly anticipated on a smaller scale in the episodes through which we pass. The life-conflict of which we sometimes speak as though it were a great whole, is in reality made up of the various trials which are scattered along our path, those seasons

in which the soul in its loneliness is left to wrestle with some strong sin or sorrow, and out of which it comes exalted and purified—or, alas! sometimes baffled and defeated. And in the issue of these separate struggles we read a kind of prophecy of the final destinies of our existence. The secret sin which haunts our footsteps, so powerful in the strong hold which it has laid on our habits and affections, which it is so easy to indulge, so well-nigh impossible to resist—such a sin as this the very plague of our heart—either growing with our growth, and rooting itself deeper and deeper in our hearts, until nothing but a miracle of God's grace can tear it up—or, on the other hand, with many a secret struggle, many a secret pang, of which the world knows nothing, fought against, prayed against, at last, by the aid of God working in us, put to flight—what is this but an image of the issues, for good or for evil, of the life-long conflict between the flesh and the spirit? Or again, some overwhelming and crushing sorrow, which seems to empty life at one stroke of all that makes life worth living, received with a dull, sullen despair which refuses to look up to God or ask for His strength, lying like a canker at the heart, and consuming us with inward fretfulness, at length cured, if cured at all, by the mere lapse of time—or, on the other hand, accepted with, at least, an endeavour,

(it may be but a faint and feeble one,) after submission to that blessed will which governs all things, gradually illumined by God's grace, at length transfigured into an angel of light, beckoning us onward to our true rest—what is this but a type of the opposite results of the discipline of life's sorrow upon the souls of men? Only let us be sure of this, that as God at last brings His faithful ones, after they have passed the waves of this troublesome world, into the haven where they would be, so also in each particular trial and incident of our life His Hand is working for the good of those who love Him—even here below, He, in whose presence is the fulness of joy, will appear to their souls. He will open out to them, at least in part, the reasons of His mysterious dispensation in the past, will enable them to trace His working in that which at the time seemed so confused and perplexed, will show them that what at first sight seemed such a hindrance and drawback in their path, has really helped them forward on their heavenward road ; He will make them to know that it is not without cause that He has done all that He has done in them, that no sorrow has been without its special mission, no heaviness without its work upon the soul, no tribulation which has not fallen out rather to the furtherance of their true peace and happiness.

Let us resolve, then, during this Easter season to find our joy, where alone true joy is to be found—even in Him who is the Everlasting Joy of His people. For a time He may seem to hide His face from us, but it is only that He may with everlasting kindness have mercy on us; do not let us be discouraged if at times we seek, not to find, like Mary Magdalene in the early morning of the Resurrection Day—if ever our Easter Festival is dashed with sorrow; it is only in heaven that we can enjoy the unchanging, uninterrupted vision of God. Our Lord in this life visits us as He did the disciples during the forty days, only at intervals—now here, now there—now remaining with us for a lengthened period, now vanishing almost in the moment of His manifestation. But whether He vouchsafes us the oft-repeated blessing of His realised Presence, or allows us to journey sadly on our way, our eyes holden that we should not experience the sensible consolation of knowing that He is with us in the way in which we go, let us hold fast as for our very life to the truth that all joy without Him is only real sorrow, all sorrow in which He is present though it may be hidden, only disguised joy. Seek we the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore—and we know well where we may find Him, where He loves to make Himself known to His people to the joy of their heart. He is still

present among us even to the end of the world ; He is not far away from every one of us. Have we not been made members of His Mystical Body, bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, in Holy Baptism ? and, though we have deeply sinned since then, may we not by repentance return to the state of grace in Him ? May we not, if penitent and faithful now, continually renew our spiritual life in Him ? In prayer and praise, in meditation, in His Holy Word, above all in the Holy Communion of His Body and Blood, He is ever waiting to be gracious to us, He is ever ready to make us glad with the joy of His countenance. If, then, we would see Jesus, let us wait on Him continually—not, indeed, from a mere desire to share in the joy of the Apostles (that will be as God judges best for our souls,) but rather because He is the one Hope and Refuge of our hearts, apart from Whom we cannot live, in union with Whom we fear not to die—the very source and end of our being.

May we, indeed, all cling ever closer and closer to Him, Who died and rose again for us, Who with the energy of that Risen Life is ever ready to sustain and quicken our drooping souls ! So shall He, indeed, be our guide unto death; so shall He manifest Himself with ever-increasing power to our souls, so shall our deepest trust and joy be less and less in the uncertain goods of this world, and more

and more in the Lord, so shall we behold Him continually even here below, though it be through a glass darkly. So in the eve of life shall He speak peace to our souls, and in the great Easter of eternity shall we see Him face to face, and rejoice with that joy which no man can take from us.

And the words of our text teach us that religion is no source of gloom or heaviness to the mind, but the source of purest joy. Many of you know full well what earthly joy is, and there may be some who are for the present fully satisfied with it. And it cannot be denied that the draught of this world's pleasure is, under certain conditions, absolutely intoxicating, that for the moment it leaves nothing to be desired : yet the slightest rational calculation will convince you that such joy must be by its very nature transitory, that you cannot carry it with you into the anxieties of later life, the feebleness of old age, the bed of death. But there is a joy which the world cannot give, which the world cannot take away, which earthly disappointment cannot crush, which sickness and infirmities cannot rob you of, which is crowned and not obliterated by the supreme moment of death. It is that joy in the Lord, which is the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the heritage of those who have given their hearts to God. Only gradually will that priceless treasure be yours ; but in proportion

as you earnestly seek it, you will find. It is not easy perhaps at first to find any pleasure in religion and religious duties ; self-denial and self-discipline and regularity are painful, and the path may seem dark and difficult ; but only press forward and the reward is certain, "there will spring up a light "for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such "as are true-hearted." You will know what it is to have a conscience at peace in itself, at peace with God ; you will know the joy of being as in God's presence here, of looking forward with a good hope of an eternity of happiness hereafter.

SERMON XII.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE GIVER OF LIFE.

(WHITSUN DAY.)

2 Cor. iii. 6.

"*The Spirit giveth life.*"

AT length, my brethren, the day of Pentecost is fully come, the glad day of Jubilee, which crowns the seven weeks which have elapsed since the great Christian Feast of the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord and Saviour. Now in the early summer, when the earth is arrayed in all the freshness and luxuriance of her new verdure, does the Church of God celebrate with great devotion and joy the ever-memorable day on which the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost—the Third Person of the adorable Trinity—descended as a gracious rain upon the inheritance of the Lord, refreshing it when it was weary, and causing the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Now does the King, who but ten days ago ascended up on high and led captivity captive, pour down from

His throne of Love and Glory the gifts which He has received for men, yea, even for His enemies; now does the precious ointment on the head of our great High Priest descend to the skirts of His clothing, even to the humblest member of the mystical Body—now does the Great Prophet of the New Covenant give forth His Law, not as of old amid the thunderings and the lightnings of Sinai, but amid the bright cleansing wind, and the gentle tongue of fire, playing softly on the heads of the first fathers of the Church.

To-day, God the Holy Ghost makes His Tabernacle among men, and commences His gracious reign upon earth: to-day, He who has hitherto fallen only as it were drop by drop upon the souls of men descends in an overflowing shower of gifts and graces: to-day the Church is knit together in the unity of the Spirit, and enters on her career of suffering and victory; to-day she receives a corporate existence, and finds herself face to face for the first time with the world, to receive its homage or its scorn: to-day she witnesses for the first time by the mouth of her great Apostle to her risen and ascended Lord: to-day she receives, in the three thousand souls converted to Christ, the first fruits of that great multitude which no man can number: to-day she is conscious of a vitality and a power which are not of this world, and which witness to

the supernatural life which she has received of God: to-day the first Apostles out of weakness are made strong, and wax valiant in fight: those who a few weeks before met together with closed doors for fear of the Jews now stand in the gaze of all men: he who on the eve of the Passion had shrunk from the very breath of accusation lifts up his voice with great boldness to proclaim Jesus Christ before the assembled multitudes of Jerusalem. Yes, this day is indeed a day of great triumph for the little flock of the first believers; now is sent from heaven the marvellous answer to the prayers and supplications of those nine days which followed the Lord's Ascension; now are the timid strengthened, the doubtful directed, the patient rewarded, the sad-hearted comforted. The words of the Prophets of old receive their full accomplishment; the Lord's Promise is abundantly fulfilled; the power of the ascended Mediator, and of His all-prevailing Intercession, is displayed before all men; in the light of this new illumination the past is transfigured, the Apostles know Jesus Christ no more after the flesh, but after a far higher, after a spiritual manner; His words and deeds are supernaturally made present to their memory, they acquire a new significance and are raised to a higher level: the character of the New Kingdom and its future destinies gradually dawn upon their soul, and they go forth, from the

chamber at Jerusalem and the Pentecostal outpouring, weak in themselves, but strong in the might of God's Spirit for the pulling down of strongholds and the casting down of every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

Such are the magnificent, the life-giving, the never-ending fruits of the first Whitsun-Day, the memory of which gladdens and elevates to-day the souls of the faithful throughout the world. But Pentecost, my brethren, is no mere anniversary of an event which (however stupendous) is past and gone, or at least lives on only in the effects which it has produced. The Holy Ghost who descended for the first time on that day came to abide with us (as our Lord has said) *for ever*—even until the end of the world. From that hour to this, through the eighteen centuries of Christianity, the Divine Spirit has been reigning within the souls and consciences of Christian men and women, now with fuller, now with fainter light, at certain times and places it may be well-nigh hidden behind the thick cloud of human perversity and sin, yet ever bursting forth in new developments of spiritual life, and testifying to the treasure contained within the frail earthen vessels of our humanity. And if the history of the Church be a record sadly blurred and blotted by that wrath of man which worketh not

the righteousness of God, if that most terrible form of iniquity—the degeneracy of what is holiest—has at times eaten out her very life, if what is in the main the cause of God's truth has not been altogether unsullied by human passion and human prejudice—yet the Christian student who refuses persistently to look upon the dark side of the past will be ready to acknowledge and adore the working of the Eternal Spirit through the varied and chequered career of the Spouse of Christ.

Truly, my brethren, it is *the Spirit who giveth life*; and when faith has grown dim, and love has waxed cold, and iniquity abounds, and the scorner become bold, then it is that by His powerful inspiration He kindles anew the heavenly flame within the fold of Christ, and awakens a primitive zeal and fervour in the hearts of His faithful people. Again the wonders of the day of Pentecost are renewed, again the world gazes in wonder on a fresh and unexpected development of the Church's life; again the mockers are ready with some natural explanation of the spiritual phenomena, which they lack the capacity to understand; again the believers glorify the Name of Christ, and swell the ranks of the redeemed. But apart from these special and exceptional manifestations of the life-giving power of the Spirit, apart from those triumphs of the faith which attract the notice even

of the world, the Holy Ghost is working His marvellous transformation in the inner life, even in times which to the superficial observer appear dead and cold. God never leaves Himself without witness on earth, and even in the darkest ages, there are not wanting those who in life's "stillest shade" maintain by their unearthly conversation and their hidden deeds of goodness the tradition of the Church's sanctity, and witness to the continued Presence of the Divine Spirit among the sons of men. And do not those lives so meek and saintly, passed amid days of trouble and rebuke, with few outward advantages, and amid scanty means of grace, with no high standard set before their eyes by any living example or authority, rebuke us, my brethren, who are living in the midst of what may fairly be deemed a revival of the Church's life, who know so much and do so little, who are in many ways brought so near to God, and yet cherish so little of the Divine Life within our souls? Yes, it is the Spirit who giveth life; with Him imperfect knowledge, and limited opportunities, and infrequent means of grace (so we use them to the full), may lead us on to high attainments in saintliness; without Him the fullest measure of exterior advantages may but increase our condemnation: we may starve in the midst of plenty.

But, my brethren, let us ask ourselves what we

know of this life of the Spirit within our own soul, whether it is to us, who are now living out our brief allotted time in this day and generation, at least to some extent a living reality, or whether it is a mere pious form of words to which we have ceased to attach any very definite meaning. And in asking this let us ask ourselves singly, individually. Do not let us ask whether we recognise a spiritual life in the case of others, whether we believe that the Holy Ghost works within the souls of *others*, that He is the author of those fair fruits of love, joy, peace, which we witness and admire in the lives of other Christians: let us ask whether we know anything of all this for ourselves, whether it forms part of our own experience. It is quite possible to have a theoretical admiration for godliness, to be kindled with a sort of spurious enthusiasm by the self-denying lives of God's people, to submit one's intellect with the most unbounded submission to faith in the spiritual world, to be in the habit of employing religious words and phrases which bring with them a kind of sentimental gratification, and yet all the time to be utter strangers to the reality of that of which we talk so readily, to ignore for ourselves and our own life the office and work of God the Holy Ghost. On our answer to this question really hangs our eternity. It is not necessary that you should be what is called an

unbeliever in order to exhibit the most profound and alarming indifference on the subject of the spiritual and religious life. In point of fact a nominal Christianity often serves only for a decent veil to cover over from others and if possible from one's self, the most entire, the most engrossing devotion to the pursuits and interests of this present life. There are, of course, my brethren, those in this, as in every age, who deny altogether the existence of the unseen world and its powers, who are the avowed advocates of a blank materialism, who justify, that is on theoretical grounds, conduct which is only too common among those who profess and call themselves Christians. They have at least the merit of consistency. They will tell you that belief in the existence of the ever-blessed Trinity, in the sin of man and the redeeming love of God, in the human soul, and the warfare waged within it between the flesh and the spirit, together with the issue of that present warfare in an eternity of bliss or woe, is but a dream of the human mind ; they will bid you have faith in nothing but that which you can see, and taste, and handle ; they will tell you to make the best of this life, and not to torment yourself about a future which exists only in the imagination. My brethren, addressing as I am a congregation of Christians met together on the Feast of Pentecost, to celebrate

the first descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Church, I will not insult you by supposing that you listen to such sentiments with anything but horror and indignation. You cannot but feel that apart from any question of truth or falsehood the effect of their general adoption would be to turn the world into a moral wilderness. But you may feel this, and have only a dead faith. And though even a dead faith in the great verities of the spiritual world may have some wholesome effect upon society at large, yet you must be aware that for yourselves individually such a faith is worth literally nothing, it is but the faith of the devils who believe and tremble. A man who lives for this world, and for this world only, who though he denies not in words the fact that there is a Holy Ghost, and that He works within the souls of men, yet by his whole temper of mind and by every action of his life contradicts such a belief is, in the sight of Almighty God, no better than the infidel who says openly, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." He professes that he knows God, but in works denies Him.

Do we then, let me ask again, know anything of this kingdom of the Spirit within our own souls? Have we or have we not within us that spiritual life which is the only abiding reality, that life of which He who came to dwell among men to-day is the alone Author and Giver?

There is one point at least, my brethren, on which you have no doubt. You are all of you conscious of the possession of a natural life—a life of the body and of the mind. However little you know about your soul and its secret history you are at least fully conscious of certain facts about yourself which in their main outline are common to you and all the rest of mankind. You know that you were born into this world on a certain day, at a certain place, of certain parents, that you have lived so many years in it with a varying amount of health and happiness and success, that you have found yourself placed in a certain position in life with certain definite duties to perform, that your state of life has brought with it some measure of satisfaction, some measure of disappointment and sorrow, that it is perhaps not altogether so sad or so happy as your early experience pictured it ; you know that you have a body which is to you the source both of enjoyment and suffering ; you know that while you have some peculiarities of feeling and disposition you are in the main liable to be acted on by the same influences which affect your fellow men, that you are apt to be impelled by the same motives, to be agitated by the same passions with them ; you know that you have been endowed with a natural understanding of a higher or a lower order, by which you are able to take part in a

greater or a less degree in the great world of science and history and thought by which you are surrounded ; you know also that, after you have lived a certain number of years here, unless your life should be cut short by some violent disease or sudden accident, your bodily strength will begin to fail you and the infirmities of old age gather upon you ; the earthly tenement in which you have passed through your varied career will at length be worn out ; one day you must meet the mystery of death—the one great certainty of the future for all—your body will be placed in the earth and return to dust ; the years will roll on as before ; those whom you have loved on earth will themselves be taken away one by one, and unless you should have raised yourself far above, or sunk far below the average mass of men, your very name will be before long forgotten in the place in which you have, it may be, lived and laboured all your time.

That, my brethren, is a true picture of life considered in its material, its merely natural aspect. And that is too often what men have in their minds when they think of their own life or that of others. But that is not all, rather it is nothing at all, it is the mere material setting or frame-work in which the true life is enshrined, the earthly accidents of that brief probation season which we call

time, events which perish in their very passage, in themselves scarcely worth the serious thought and attention of an immortal being, important only in the use we make of them, and the effect which we allow them to exercise upon our eternal destiny. The outward conditions of our existence agitate but the very surface of our true being ; there is a life which you, and I, and every other of God's rational creatures possess, which lies utterly beyond the research of the physiologist who investigates the structure of the body, or of the psychologist who maps out the various laws of the mind of man. It is the life of the Spirit of God within the soul, the life in which the death of the body is but a passing episode, the life which determines our eternal future in heaven or hell. On your birth into this world, God joins in close and intimate connection with your body an immortal soul, created by Himself for Himself, formed in His own image, endowed with a portion of that awful prerogative of the Divine Nature—the power of free-will—fitted to find its true bliss at length in the only refuge of the creature—the presence and possession of the Creator. Into that soul of yours the Eternal Spirit has entered in the life-giving Sacrament of Baptism ; yea, your very body was made the Temple of the Holy Ghost. Your soul, by nature alienated from God, and having a natural tendency towards sin,

was then restored to the Divine likeness ; through the indwelling of the Spirit you were rendered capable of knowing and loving God, you had a new principle replanted in you, a well of water springing up into eternal life. From that hour to this, this spiritual life has been running its course within you side by side with your merely natural life, affected and interpenetrated by the latter indeed in manifold ways, but never confused or identified with it. That, my brethren, is the life which the Spirit gives. Just as the years which have passed over your head have imperceptibly and gradually left their traces upon your face, and moulded your mind, so have they been doing their work upon that inner, that spiritual life of which we speak. Through joy and through sorrow, through disappointment and success, through the varied scenes and stages of your earthly lot, has God the Holy Ghost been carrying on His work within your soul ; by little and little for the most part does He train us ; just as the days which pass by leave no visible impressions upon us, as they are reckoned one by one, and yet in the end convert youth into age, so does the discipline of the Spirit step by step effect its mighty result upon the features of the soul's life ; by prayer and by Communion, by increased sensitiveness of the conscience to sin, by secret aspirations after a higher life, by awful fears and warnings, by sorrows which

bruise and crush our earthly hopes and joys, by visions of the ineffable beauty of holiness, by these and such as these does He plead within us, does He quicken and sustain our true life. The soul may suffer many a relapse, there may be seasons in which there is little advance, perhaps even some ground lost, and yet on the whole true progress may be being made. If only we are faithful to Him He will not leave us until He has accomplished the thing whereof He has spoken to us, He will guide us onward by a way which we know not, He will prepare us for the Beatific Vision of God. So, when the time comes for us to say farewell to the scenes by which we have been surrounded here, will the life within us burn brightly, and we shall at length enter upon that Life, of which even our spiritual life on earth was but a shadow—Life in the Presence of the eternal, self-existent God, in the Presence of Him Who is the very Fountain of all life.

But, my brethren, there is another side to the picture. If the light that is in you be darkness how great is that darkness? If you have grieved the Holy Spirit pleading with you, if you have rejected His inspirations, crushed out by little and little the spiritual vitality which you once possessed, if you are becoming less and less sensitive to the things of the unseen world, less and less conscious of something

within you which dares to hold communion with God and look up to Him, if you are being more and more entirely wrapped up in the passing interests by which you are surrounded, be they political, social, or individual, if you seldom or never think of the existence which lies before you when all the outward accidents of your earthly existence have dropped for ever away, then, indeed, are you in great peril of your life, lest even on this side the grave the true Life-giver desert for ever the house in which He has endured so many repulses, and so the death of the body lead you only to that living death beyond the grave—eternal separation from God.

Yet is there hope even for the most hardened sinner on this glad day of Pentecost. The Spirit giveth life, and that life which He has once given He is ever ready to renew. Brethren, may you who have all but lost it, seek it where alone it can be found, may you who already cherish it, seek it in larger measure from Him who to-day came, as did the Everlasting Son, from heaven that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly.

SERMON XIII.

LIFE AND REST AND JOY IN GOD.

(TRINITY SUNDAY.)

1 COR. xv. 28.

"That God may be all in all."

WE have reached, my brethren, the goal and crown of the first portion of the Christian year. The sublime and august mystery of the Ever-Blessed Trinity in Unity, which the Church proposes for our adoration to-day, sums up and completes the wonders of creating, redeeming, sanctifying Love, which have successively been brought before us.

*"Along the Church's central space,
The sacred weeks with unfelt pace
Have borne us on from grace to grace,"*

until we find ourselves to-day caught up to the very Throne of God; a voice sounds from the opened heavens, "Come up hither;" we are invited to enter into the Holy of Holies, we find ourselves

prostrate amid the adoring hosts of heaven, before the very Shechinah of the Divine Presence, we venture to gaze into the inner depths of the Eternal, Uncreated, Self-existent Essence of God ; there in that vast ocean of light and love the mystery of the adorable Trinity is dimly revealed to us as we are able to bear it ; there is the ineffable splendour of the Eternal Father, uncreated and unbegotten, incessantly adored by those pure spirits drawn from nothingness by His will and word ; there is the Son begotten from everlasting of the Father, of His substance, yet revealed to the eyes of men and angels in that human body which He assumed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and which He has for ever indissolubly united to his Godhead, glowing with light and majesty, yet marked by the wounds which He received for sinners ; there is the Blessed Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, together with them worshipped and glorified, the Spirit of might and sweetness with His seven-fold gifts ; yet the Three Persons in some unspeakable manner are but one God, of Whom, through Whom, to Whom are all things, the Alpha and Omega of all creation, before whose awful Majesty we poor sinners on earth on this high Festival, uniting ourselves with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, fall down with faces veiled and hearts adoring, crying, “ Holy, Holy, Holy,

“Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is “to come.”

Fitly indeed does Trinity Sunday close all that has preceded it ; we do well to end all with God, to cast ourselves to-day into that vast and limitless ocean of the Divine Being, which is the source and end of all things, to sum up all in one great act of wondering loving worship. For we celebrate to-day not what God has done for us, but what He is in His own essence and nature ; we commemorate not His acts in time, but we acknowledge and adore Him as He lives in His own blessed, self-existent, self-sufficing nature, from everlasting to everlasting ; we rise as it were for a moment above the limitations of space and time, into the region of absolute being, into the great “now” of eternity. And so Trinity Sunday has no octave, but is itself the octave of Pentecost, because in the mystery of this festival, as in some mighty harmony, all the sweet notes of the Faith are embraced—because the worship of the Church so to speak exhausts itself in one supreme and final recognition of the Eternal God. For, my brethren, the whole work of our creation and restoration lies hid in germ in the recesses of the Divine Power and Compassion ; it is because God is what He is that He has done for us what He has done. Creation, Redemption, Sanctification, spring out of the love of the Creator,

Redeemer, Sanctifier. We have followed step by step since last Advent the wonderful process by which we have been brought nearer to God and made capable of an eternity of bliss in His Presence. Through the weeks of expectation we prayed and prepared ourselves until on the night of the Nativity we knelt beside the manger of Bethlehem, and adored our God incarnate in the form of a new-born Infant ; we followed Him through His sacred infancy and childhood, shedding His first drops of blood in the rite of Circumcision, pursued by the hate of Herod into a strange land, hidden in poverty and obedience at Nazareth, yet even then by sudden flashes revealing the Divine Light which glowed beneath His fleshly tabernacle, calling the simple shepherds and the learned magi to His cradle, displaying an unearthly wisdom in His boyhood before the Doctors of the Law ; we traced His three years' ministry of patient love and well-doing ; we witnessed His miracles of power, we listened to His parables of heavenly doctrine ; that was the season of the Epiphany in which He manifested forth His glory ; then with Septuagesima the record of the Creation and the Fall called us back to the thought of ourselves, and our own fallen condition in the sight of God ; with the thought of self came the thought of sin, and so we entered upon the weeks of penitential sorrow, consecrated by the memory of

our Saviour's forty days, Fasting and Temptation, until, in those last days over which there hung the darkness and the sorrow of the Divine Passion, thoughts of our own sinfulness and of the amazing love of our suffering God strangely blended themselves together, and awoke in our hearts at least some increased earnestness and devotion ; the shadows thickened around us, and we stood at length beneath the uplifted Cross of Calvary, we gazed upon the pale and wounded form of our dying Redeemer, we listened to the last words of power and compassion which fell from His sacred lips ; a few hours more and our night of sorrow was turned into a morning of exceeding gladness ; the Paschal Alleluias were resounding through Christendom, we gazed into the open sepulchre, and heard from the angel's mouth the Gospel of the Resurrection ; for forty days we walked in the light and joy of the Lord's Risen Life, and then on the Feast of the Ascension we were led forth to Bethany, and worshipped our King with joy, as He was slowly borne upward through the expectant ranks of angels in our very nature to His Throne on the right hand of the Father ; for nine days we continued with the Apostles with one accord in prayer and supplication, and then when the day of Pentecost had fully come, we celebrated with great devotion that day of light and sweetness on which

the Holy Ghost shed abroad His Blessed Presence within the heart of the Church, and united her by a spiritual bond of union to her ascended Head ; and having thus witnessed the work of the Father, who so loved the world, of the Only-Begotten, who though He was rich for our sake became poor, of the Blessed Paraclete, whose delights are to be with the sons of men, we sum up all in this Feast of the Holy Trinity, on which we worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God, who has wonderfully made, and yet more wonderfully redeemed, the human race.

Yes, my brethren, all ends at last in God, all is contained in Him, who is the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is our all in all. And thus it is that the Church's year with all its varied scenes and events culminates in what is at once so simple and so profound—the thought of God. The Being of God is indeed the mystery of mysteries—all other mysteries which He has revealed to us lead up at last to this. The Incarnation, the Passion, the Glorified Humanity of Jesus, are but the manifestations in time of that eternal Life and Love, out of the depths of whose Being they are drawn. All that God has done for us has for its object to draw us at length to Himself, whose very existence is the joy of the creature, whom we thank for His own great glory, more than

for all His gifts of nature or of grace, who will Himself throughout the days of eternity be the exceeding great reward of His people.

To-day's Festival then seems to simplify and verify all creaturely existence, to gather up into the magnificent and all-embracing oneness of its ineffable mystery, all the scattered and complex elements of life which lie around us. It proclaims to us that whether in the history of the Church or of the world, or in the varied phases of our own temporal and spiritual discipline, God is indeed all in all.

For, my brethren, the God of the Christian is not a mere abstraction, the necessary but infinitely remote First Cause of all things, whose existence demands at best nothing but a reverential recognition ; He is not the God of the Pantheist, whose existence is not distinguishable from the universe around us, and to whom we therefore can stand in no personal relation whatsoever ; He is a God, who has revealed Himself to us in His three-fold existence, as Our Father, Our Saviour, Our Sanctifier, as One in whom we live and move and have our being, who has created us for Himself, and preserves us in being each moment of our life, who has taken our flesh and raised it to the heavenly places while He continues to be present with us in holy mysteries on earth, who by His strengthening

and illuminating grace presides over every thought and impulse of our inner life, who in manifold ways is about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways, who is leading us, if we will, to the eternal enjoyment of Himself in heaven. Such is the God before whom we bow in awful reverence to-day ; verily we know what we worship.

And, first, our God is all in all in the shifting scenes of the world's life. When we look out upon the tangled and perplexed web of history, the rise and the fall of mighty empires, the changing dynasties, the successive forms of government and social life which sweep over the face of the earth, the instability of all things, the recurring cycle of events, the growth which ends only in decay, the constant ebb and flow of political life, our heart will sometimes ask, To what purpose is this waste ? Whither is it all tending ? Is there any thread which strings together this chaotic mass of events, is there any vast design which is growing towards maturity by these accumulations of the ages ? Are we to believe in the world's progressive life, or are we to resign ourselves to a dull and apathetic despair, looking out upon the present and the past as upon some hopeless, unintelligible strife, in which the combatants are engaged we know not for what objects or with what issues, an ever-varying *kaleidoscope*, in which the combinations seem to

follow one another at random, and with no fixed law? In the crowning mystery of this day we read the answer to our doubts and questionings: the Lord sitteth above the waterflood, the Lord remaineth a King for ever. Beyond and above the busy turmoil of earth, in the silence of the eternal years, the Blessed Trinity lives and loves, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever; from all eternity, in the secrets of the Divine Predestination, the course of the created universe has been present to His mind; by His will that vast system in which our earth is but a speck of matter was called into being; with Him the thing which we call time has no existence; it is a necessity of His very Being that He should guide and control a world which hangs upon His Word; in the light of the Divine Presence the jangling discords of earth melt into a perfect harmony; we dare not doubt that a Divine purpose runs throughout the ages, that under the ever-changing forms of life, political or social, God is fulfilling Himself in many ways.

And so with regard to the destinies of the Church of Christ. If at times we feel anxious and troubled when we think upon her conflicts and heart-burnings, if at certain eras in her history Christ seems to sleep within the tempest-tossed barque, if for her divisions there arise within us great searchings of heart, if she no longer goes forth as in her early

days, in the freshness of her strength and joy, to convert the world to the obedience of the faith, yet we know that she ceases not to be the Bride of her unchanging Spouse ; the Eternal Trinity is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed ; behind the fleeting storms which pass across her sky is the bright sunshine of the Divine Light ; God is working where we can see nothing but the perversity and the strivings of man ; He is all in all.

Again, there is a deep rest for our own life in its temporal aspect in entering into the infinite calm which breathes around this day's Festival. Looking at life from one point of view, how baffling, how meaningless does it appear ! What mean the complaints which reach us in so many forms in literature, not so much of life's deep sorrows, as of its inconsistencies and apparent aimlessness, its want of harmony and completeness of any kind ? Purposes unfulfilled, aspirations unrealized, emotions wasted, paths which seem to lead nowhither, these lie a heavy weight upon the heart of humanity. We feel perplexed by the multiplicity and complexity of the relations into which we are thrown : how many aims we have had, how many influences have acted upon us, how many hopes we have cherished, how many affections have entwined themselves around our heart ; we have passed, it may be, through many scenes in our lives' journey, and

visited many places; we have outlived phases of mind which at one time threatened to dominate over our whole future; we have been disappointed where we have placed our foremost hopes, we have found solaces where we least expected them. Where is to be found the note which shall simplify this complex life of ours? how shall we be enabled to look back upon it with quietness and confidence, and feel that all has been working together for our final perfection and happiness? My brethren, if we have been in any degree cherishing the spiritual life within us, such a power is to be found in the thought of Him, who has done all things well, who, behind the restless, ceaseless changes of life, has been carrying out His eternal purposes concerning us, has been ordering outward events for our inward cleansing and sanctification, has been step by step training our soul for its everlasting home—who out of the unchangeableness of His own eternity has seen the end from the beginning, and been Himself the real but unseen agent in all that has befallen us. Yes, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts, if we will, may be surely fixed and settled in Him, who is indeed our all in all—who loves us with a Father's love, who sympathises with us as an elder Brother, who like a tender Comforter helpeth our infirmities. May we not look up this day to the Eternal Trinity, and

exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and
"there is none upon earth that I desire in com-
"parison of Thee?"

But, lastly, in our spiritual life everything is summed up in the vision of God. The spiritual life also is full of change and variety ; it needs to be reduced to some principle of unity. There are the continually-recurring rounds of the Church's seasons, the constant means of grace, the varied atmosphere of the inner life, times of joy and refreshment, times of fears and misgivings—there is the oft-renewed struggle with some besetting sin, the consciousness of God's grace working within us to its weakening or overthrow—we feel that we have passed through many stages of experience since we first started on our heaven-ward road, that there is an element of restlessness even in our deepest, truest life. But in the Presence of the Most High there is a great calm ; as we enter into heaven itself, and fall down with the four and twenty elders before the rainbow-encircled Throne, we feel that amid all the alternations which pass across our inner life it is God who is working within us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure ; He is Himself the way, by which we travel to Himself the end ; Himself the Life in whom alone we live ; Himself the prize when all our warfare is accomplished. God—the Holy, Blessed, Ever

Glorious Trinity—is our all in all. And if at times there seems to be a danger lest even by the things of God the soul be hidden from God, lest efforts begun for His glory should end in self-pleasing, and activities which gather round His service produce an atmosphere of busy excitement in which He is not present, lest unreality eat out the very life of our prayers, and Holy Communion itself become something less than union with Him, one remedy at least lies in steadfastly placing ourselves in the exceeding stillness and quiet of that primal mystery, which fills and almost overcharges our hearts on this great Day, in contemplating Him, who is the fountain of all spiritual life, who, through prayer and Sacraments, is invisibly moulding and preparing us for the Beatific Vision of Himself throughout eternity.

Thus we find that all centres at last in God ; all existence stands at length in relation to Him, who is the Fount of all Being. The life of nations as well as that of individuals springs out of the exhaustless depths of His eternal counsels. The vanishing, transitory, apparently unconnected scenes which chase one another in the world, in the Church, in our own natural and spiritual life, acquire unity and consistency when they are viewed as dependent on the will of the unchangeable and eternal God. Life is indeed many-sided and

discordant when we look at it out of our own human weakness and imperfection, but as we view it in the light of God we learn to believe that all is well. Apart from Him its greatest achievements appear poor and unsatisfactory : when referred to Him its smallest details are dignified and ennobled.

May we learn more and more to look through its busy noises and unquiet movements to Him, who is behind the veil—to find our rest in Him who from one generation to another is the Refuge of those who fly to Him—to know for ourselves that He is indeed our all in all, in time and in eternity ! So when the sights and sounds of earth have passed for ever away, shall we enter into the fulness of His joy, and take our part in the beauty of that worship, of which we catch but the faint and distant echoes to-day. So shall our eyes, in the land that is very far off, behold the glory of the Eternal Trinity revealed for ever in all His love and Majesty, and adored by men and angels with ceaseless homage in that kingdom which knows no end.

SERMON XIV.

SELF-DENIAL NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

(FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.)

S. LUKE XVI. 19-20.

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus."

WE have now entered, my brethren, upon what may be called the practical portion of the Christian Year. From Advent to Trinity Sunday we commemorate those acts of Divine mercy by which the human race has been restored to the favour of Almighty God, and has through Christ gained more than had been lost through Adam. We have adored the love of God in the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Sending of the Holy Ghost, and we concluded all last Sunday by the celebration of that foundation mystery of our Faith—the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity in Unity. We now enter upon the Second division of the Church's year. In the Sundays after Trinity—of which this is the first—

we do not commemorate any special facts or doctrines, except in so far as each Lord's Day is, of course, a weekly memorial of our Blessed Lord's Resurrection. In these Sundays the Church presses home upon us the practical lessons, which flow from the Faith once for all delivered ; having laid the foundation firmly in those great truths, on which hang all our hopes, she now proceeds to build upon them, and to instruct her children in those things which a Christian is bound to do to his soul's salvation. Thus right faith precedes ; right practice follows. It is true that we cannot possibly lead a Christian life, and one which will lead us to heaven, unless we firmly hold those great doctrines of the Faith, which alone supply a sufficient sanction and aid to a holy life ; but a right faith is not of itself sufficient to save us ; alas, many will be lost who are no infidels. A right faith is not enough ; we must have a living faith—a faith that is which leads us to do good works, and live as God would have us live. And it is the great object of this after-Trinity season to lead us on in the ways of eternal life, to instruct us in those duties towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves, which spring from a lively Faith. In the Epistles and Gospels especially we shall have set before us passages of Holy Scripture, which have this practical tendency, which bear in many ways on the details of our life.

and action. May God the Holy Ghost be with us all during this season, and give us an ear to hear, and a heart to follow, the important truths which are about to be brought before us, that next Advent (if we be permitted to reach it,) may find us nearer to God, and more conformed to His will.

The Epistle of this day speaks to us in gentle tones. It is an exhortation to the great Christian grace of love, at once the most essential and the highest of all graces. But the Holy Gospel is one of the most awful passages in the New Testament, and contains one of the most solemn warnings ever uttered by our Lord. It meets us on the very threshold of these Sundays after Trinity, and bids us look well to our lives, lest we be spending the days of our pilgrimage here in such a manner that the step which carries us into the next world, will lead us to our infinite surprise and remorse to a place of unspeakable torment.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus our Lord lifts for a moment the veil which hides from us the unseen world; He conducts us to that mysterious region on the other side of the grave, which lies so very near to all of us, and to which we may pass at any moment. Surely it must have occurred to many of us, as we stand and gaze upon the still, cold form of one, whose soul has fled away, to think with awe and wonder of the present

condition and feelings of that soul. We know that it has not ceased to exist, that somewhere in God's universe it is living and conscious, able to look back upon the life which it has so lately left, and to anticipate the eternity on which it has just entered. Holy Scripture does not ordinarily satisfy our curiosity on these points; its general teaching seems to be:—enough that the way of eternal life is now set before you with sufficient plainness, enough that you know that a life of faith and obedience will lead you to eternal happiness, a life of sin to eternal ruin—if the motives which are placed before you on earth are not sufficient to induce you to give yourselves to God's service, neither would you be persuaded though one rose from the dead, and described to you, in the most minute detail, the fate of souls beyond the grave. But in this parable our Lord does vouchsafe us a glimpse of that world into which we are all of us hastening—He does contrast the condition of the souls immediately on their leaving the body. And what a glimpse it is—on the one hand how full of peace and comfort, on the other, how full of horror and punishment, which exceeds our power of imagination. In a few short simple words He says enough to make us feel that prosperity and enjoyment in this world is worthless than nothing when it is weighed against the life which is to come—it is but a mockery and a

delusion—a dream which has in it no substantial reality, which passes away for ever, and leaves us face to face with the stern realities of life, which will not, and cannot, be shaken off.

The rich man and Lazarus—these are the two contrasted characters. Notice that there is something significant in the fact that one of them only—Lazarus—is called by his name. The rich man is but a rich man—one of crowds of others—one of whom nothing is known but that God had endowed him, like many others, with a considerable portion of this world's goods, which he seems to have employed very much to his own satisfaction—he may have been much looked up to, and respected by his contemporaries—but God's word knows nothing of him but that he was a certain rich man. On the other hand, Lazarus, the wretched outcast, is one of those of whom God says, “I know thee by ‘name, thou art Mine.’” His name was less than nothing to those who passed by him, perhaps, with a shrug of pity or aversion, but it stands for ever recorded in the Book of Life. God's favourites and the world's are by no means identical:

We can scarcely picture a greater contrast than the earthly lot of these two men, who are here brought together in such close *juxta-position*. Up to death all the advantages seem on one side, all the disadvantages on the other, and then their position

is exactly reversed, and that, so far as we can see, for eternity. Our Lord says little, but the picture which He places before us is full of life. There is the rich man—who possesses in abundance those perishing goods of this life, for the mere chance of acquiring which so many are content to barter their soul. He is a man of mark in the world in which he moves ; he is clad in the finest and the richest garments which money can procure—purple and fine linen ; evidently he takes a considerable pride in his personal appearance. Then he is careful to satisfy his appetite to the full : his table is loaded with the richest dainties which his money can procure, and that not on some special occasions only, but every day of his life. There is nothing further said, my brethren, to his discredit. Perhaps we do not like to condemn one who is so persistently like ourselves, but do not let us exaggerate or imagine evil where our Lord has told us of none. The rich man was, so far as we know, a perfectly moral character ; he was what would be called an exceeding respectable and useful member of society ; his rich dress might have been justified by his worldly position ; his well-furnished table does not appear to have led him into drunkenness or other sensual sins. Nor is it at all necessary to suppose, as some have done, that he refused the poor beggar who lay at his gates, the scraps which came from

his table : Our Lord's words do not imply *that*, but perhaps rather that Lazarus got what he sought by being laid at the rich man's door : it would cost the rich man nothing, perhaps he did not even know of it.

Now look on Lazarus—poor, nay an absolute beggar. Nor was that all ; his body was covered with ulcerated sores ; some friendly hands conveyed him to the rich man's gate, where he dragged through his wretched day : the very dogs came and licked his sores. My brethren, you know the rest; Lazarus was at length released from his miseries, and the next words speak to us of a bright vision of angels, and the rest in Abraham's bosom. The rich man passed a few more days or years in comfort and worldly ease, died, and was buried (no doubt his funeral became his station), and awoke in torments, imploring if it were but for a drop of cold water to cool his tongue. It is terrible, very terrible, but they are the words of Him who is the truth. What are we to learn from this sad history ?

The point which it most concerns us to know is wherein did the sin of the rich man consist, why was it that he was punished so terribly for his manner of living in this world ? It cannot be that he was tormented simply for being rich, or Lazarus rewarded for being poor ; for God is no “respecter

“of persons;” there must have been something highly displeasing to Almighty God in the rich man, or He would never have condemned him. Now, as we have said, he was not guilty of any open or gross sins, nor again, probably, was it for his want of charity towards Lazarus that he suffered—he may have been amiable and kind-hearted, we cannot say that he was not. Many who live a life like that of the rich man would no doubt flatter themselves that they had a good hope of heaven; they stand so well with themselves and others, they have never, as they think, done anything particularly amiss—why should God condemn them?

My brethren, there was one thing in the rich man which was dragging him down to punishment: he was, so far as we can see, utterly without that spirit of self-denial, which is a mark of all Christ’s faithful servants. He was no open sinner, but he was simply living to and for self; he enjoyed life, as men say, to the full; he got out of it all the satisfaction he could; he never gave up anything which could minister to his comfort or luxury; self was the centre round which his thoughts, his time, his money revolved; he was even on the very verge of excess, if he did not actually fall into it; he indulged his taste for fine dress and good food without restraint. All this is implied in the answer made to him by Abraham, in which we have the

ground of his condemnation stated, “ Son, remember “that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good “things.” Yes, he had made this life his all in all, and the result was that he found himself all unfurnished for his journey into the next—no real deeds of alms-giving, no acts of self-denial, and therefore no effectual prayers, had prepared his soul for the future.

And yet, so far are we in general from living such a life as becomes Christ’s people, that it is to be feared that many at the present day who are living very much in the manner of this rich man, guilty of no open violations of God’s law, and simply, as they would say, enjoying God’s creatures, would rather be inclined to thank God that they are not as other men are, than to tremble for their eternal safety. How many are there who would find it very hard to point to one single act which they have done or left undone simply for Christ’s sake ! How many are there to whom the very idea of denying self in any shape is utterly unfamiliar ! And yet our Lord’s words are as clear and as certain as human language can make them—“ Whosoever doth not bear his cross, “ and come after Me, he cannot be my disciple.”

In the face then of this awful warning, which your Lord gives you to-day in the Gospel, ask yourself the question—Can it be said that my life is marked by self-denial ? do I, for Christ’s sake, and for that

only, do that which is against my natural inclinations, and leave undone that which I should otherwise be inclined to do? or, on the other hand, is it my constant aim and desire to get as much enjoyment for myself as I can in life, if not to the loss and injury of others, yet without any particular thought or care about them? And it will not do to reckon as acts of self-denial instances in which our wills and inclinations have been thwarted, either by others, or by the direct action of God's Providence. We must all of us endure a great many crosses and disappointments whether we will or no; no doubt the rich man had occasionally his cares and vexations. These do not leave the stamp of the Cross upon our lives, except when they are made to minister to our spiritual good through a willing and loving acquiescence in the will of our Heavenly Father. They may become only the occasion of fresh sin in the shape of fretfulness and discontent. Self-denial is something very different to these. It does not necessarily involve any great amount of bodily discipline or abstinence, which may be impossible or unwise for some; although, doubtless the faithful observance of such seasons as that of Lent, where wisely and cautiously practised, will do much to help us to acquire it. But self-denial goes even deeper than this—it is the habit of mind which leads us in everything to ask, not how may I best

please myself, but, how may I best serve God, and aid the souls and bodies of others?

Take for instance the question of *time*. We are naturally selfish about our time ; we like to spend it in the manner which most gratifies self. Self-denial will set us about asking, Can I, by giving this or that hour which I should otherwise devote to amusement, bring any aid or pleasure to others ? Or again, take the question of *money*. We naturally like to spend our money on ourselves, or on some object which brings gratification to self. Self-denial will suggest to us to give up something which we should otherwise have liked in order to devote the money to God. This is really to give alms ; too many it is to be feared give to God of that which literally costs them nothing.

And do not let us shrink back as though self-denial were some hard, bitter thing : it brings with it greater pleasure than self-indulgence. And we may begin, if we have never practised it before, by *small acts* ; God accepts even the cup of cold water given for Christ's sake. Do not let us be frightened as though God were bidding us do some great thing ; if we are really in earnest, and make a beginning, however small and apparently trifling, God will bless us, and lead us on according to His will ; only make the experiment, and you will not fail or be disappointed.

But remember that self-denial of some kind there must be, if we are to be saved. It is the very salt of the spiritual life. A life of mere self-pleasing and self-indulgence can only end in one way. If you are conscious to yourself that your one great aim in life is to please yourself, even though you may succeed in doing it without any deadly sin, you are in great peril.

May He who alone worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure, inspire your hearts and mine with that spirit of self-denial, which is the mark of the followers of a crucified Saviour, and enable us by His grace to escape that condemnation which remaineth for those who have their treasure in this life.

SERMON XV.

THE SHORTNESS OF EARTHLY SUFFERINGS.

(FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.)

ROM. VIII. 18.

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

THE comparison which the Apostle suggests in these words, my brethren, is one of world-wide interest. Amid all the differences which sever age from age, nation from nation, man from man, one thing remains constant, one thing asserts itself by its perpetual presence—the great *fact of human suffering*. The simplicity of barbarian life cannot escape it, the refined luxury of civilization cannot bury it out of sight—it belongs not to this or that epoch in history, to this or that social organization—it is the universal heritage of man as man. You yourselves, my brethren, at this day are witnesses of its universality and its power; it is written in characters too plain to be misunderstood on the

face of the society in which you live and move ; it thrusts itself upon your notice as you pass by the hospitals, the mad-houses, the penitentiaries, monuments of human charity and human misery ; it is continually appearing under fresh forms in the journals which you daily read ; it is at once the cause and the effect of the crime at which you shudder, it meets you, as you go along your way, in forms wasted by disease and care. Even if you yourself possessed a singular exception from its sway, you would be forced to recognise its existence in the world around you—it is there as plainly as the sun in the mid-heaven. And yet you know that the tendency of mankind is to shut out of sight as much as possible the sufferings of others ; and the instinct of suffering is generally to hide itself. Were you to make it your business to see as much, instead of as little of it as possible, you would, perhaps, be utterly weighed down with sadness at the spectacle of such intense, such wide spread misery. But, my brethren, I can appeal to something else than your eyes and ears in this matter ; I can confidently call upon the witness of your own hearts. Few, indeed, must they be in any congregation who do not know by personal experience what suffering is in one shape or another. You have passed, it may be, wearisome nights and days, in which pain or weakness of body seemed to crush out your very

life and surpass your powers of endurance ; or you have passed the perhaps severer trial of a lingering illness, which made your daily work a struggle, and robbed you of all that elasticity of mind, which lends enjoyment to life's pleasures, and lightens its labours ; or you have been the victim of some carking anxiety, which has coiled itself around your heart, and reminds you of its presence by night and by day, which has robbed you of rest on your bed, and has woken with you in the early morn : or you have lost one, on whom your earthly happiness depended ; or the errors and misfortunes of others have rested like some intolerable load upon your soul. Time would fail to tell of all the forms, under which this ghost of human suffering appears in the midst of earth's banquet ; the heart of each one among you knoweth its own bitterness. Yes, and even on the little children sometimes fresh from the baptismal water, falls the shadow of life's sorrows ; they are not exempt from pain of body, and their little troubles seem to them, at least, as great ones.

I know that there are many among you, whose age would seem almost to exempt them from this universal law of suffering, the surface of whose life has been hitherto all but an unruffled calm. Yet there are some even among you, my younger brethren, who may have known what it is to undergo

something more than the pressing troubles of childhood. And for the rest of you—far be it from me to damp the generous ardour with which you are looking forward to a future, in which you have certainly everything to hope for, if you be but true to yourselves and to God. Yet I am simply repeating the experience of all the generations which have preceded us when I say that you must, ere you reach the grave, pass through moments of sorrow in which nothing but a repose in the everlasting will of God can bring you any real relief.

What, then, means that triumphant, that almost defiant voice, which has just sounded in our ears? How is it that one voyaging over the vast sea of sorrow can seem to be unconscious of the storm which rages around him, can already anticipate the rest of the eternal haven? How is it that one who is treading the thorny path of life—a child of sin and suffering like ourselves—can utter those clear, confident, cheering words—“I reckon that the ‘sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be ‘compared with the glory which shall be revealed ‘in us?’” Surely we would give much to be of the same mind as the Apostle, surely we should have found an unspeakable treasure could we thus tread under foot the troubles and annoyances which daily encompass us. My brethren, S. Paul’s words are no idle boast, no unreal expression of enthusiastic

feeling. They are the result of the most matter-of-fact, the most rational calculation. He is looking eternity full in the face, by the eye of faith he beholds the glory which shall be at the Great Day revealed in us—that glory with which the human Body of our Lord is now invested, and with which He will transfigure these poor bodies of our earthly humiliation. And, then, fresh from gazing on the heavenly vision he proceeds to weigh the future against the present. That is, indeed, the exact force of the word “I reckon.” It implies a judgment which is the result of a previous calculation, as though the Apostle said, “I have added up these “items of suffering on one side of the account, and “the grace and glory on the other ; I now strike “the balance and declare the result—the sufferings “will not even admit of a comparison—they sink “into utter insignificance, they are lost altogether “in the blaze of the heavenly light.” And who, I would ask, of all men, was more fitted than the Apostle S. Paul to form a good judgment on the matter—to strike the balance aright? He probably, as no other man before or since, had tasted of the sufferings and the glory which he here contrasts, or rather refuses to contrast. No slight experience had he had of the sufferings of this present time, which he here passes by almost with contempt. That worn and wearied form—marred, like that of his

Divine Master, more than the sons of men, branded, as he himself says, with the marks of the Lord Jesus, a target for the ridicule of the false teachers at Corinth—bore witness to the severities and hardships of a life whose single aim was to preach Christ crucified ; little wonder that his outward man was perishing, his bodily frame weak ; the labours, the stripes, the imprisonments, the assaults had not been without their effect ; he had been thrice scourged by Roman lictors, five times beaten by Jewish officers ; he had suffered the agonies of S. Stephen's martyrdom without its crown, when stoned and left for dead upon the plain of Lystra ; thrice he had suffered shipwreck, and had passed a day and a night tossed upon the waves ; in his apostolic journeys he had experienced every species of peril and privation ; added to all this he had considered it needful to bring under his body by acts of voluntary mortification—he had been, as he tells us, “in fastings often.” So much for the sufferings of his body. But what shall we say of his mental conflicts, of his continual anxiety and restless love for those souls which he had begotten in Christ Jesus—of that unselfish and intense sympathy for others’ wants and failings, which is at once the cross and the crown of the noblest natures—of the continual mis-representations and slanders to which he was exposed—of his grief over the inroads

of error and heresy, of his fears for the preservation of the true faith? Very closely was he conformed to the Passion of the Prince of sufferers. Well might he say of himself "that he carried about in his body "the dying of the Lord Jesus, that he filled up that "which was behind of the afflictions of Christ in "his flesh, for His body's sake, which is the "Church."

But, my brethren, let us look into the other scale. If the Apostle's sufferings abounded by Christ, so also did his consolations. He on whose body and mind the stamp of the Cross had been so deeply imprinted, he concerning whom it had been the special promise of Jesus on his conversion that He "would shew him how great things he must "suffer for His Name's sake," was the same Apostle who at the commencement of that long career of heroic labour and suffering had received from Almighty God an almost unparalleled mark of Divine favour and condescension ; by a marvellous rapture—whether in or out of the body he himself doubts—he had been caught up to the third heaven, to the very throne of God ; he had gazed on that Beatific Vision which will form the joy of the saints to all eternity, he had been translated into the company of the hosts of heaven, and witnessed the worship of Cherubim and Seraphim, he had been admitted into the very Presence-Chamber of

the King of kings ; his soul had been inundated with the pleasures which are at God's right hand, his whole being had been steeped in the sunshine and gladness of the Divine Presence. For one brief moment the joy and the glory of the eternal years was anticipated even in the midst of his earthly pilgrimage ; he was permitted to enjoy the prize who had not yet won the race, to view the crown ere he had well begun the conflict. What were the perils of land and sea, the stripes, the stones, the slanders, the long imprisonment, and at last the sword of the executioner, to one who had long ago seen the end of them all, who had looked beyond them into the rest which remaineth for the people of God ? Who can wonder that the brightness of that ineffable visitation of love and beauty cast its halo over the rest of his life on earth, that it lightened every cross and soothed every care, that it shed abroad perpetual peace in his heart, and converted suffering into a cause of rejoicing ? He speaks as one who has already had a glimpse of that exceeding great reward which is to crown our life's long day and death's dark night—who has entered within the veil which shrouds from our eyes the land that is very far off ; he speaks with authority, for he has made personal and special proof of life's troubles and heaven's gladness. And in full view of his past agonies and his future

crown, what does he say? how does he consider them to be related to one another? "I reckon that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy "to be compared with the glory which shall be "revealed in us."

Brethren, will you receive his witness? will you estimate the sufferings of this present time at the same rate as the Apostle? Some there are doubtless in whose mouth such language can have no place: they who have no good hope of the glory which shall be revealed, have no right to set it off against the tribulations which they are enduring: they who live for the present only must take the present as they find it, and balance its joys and its sorrows against one another,—they are scarcely likely to exclaim triumphantly that the one bear no comparison to the other, too often must they sorrowfully confess that the happy days of their life are far outnumbered by the sad ones, that those who have their hopes bounded by the grave are indeed of all men most miserable.

Yes, my brethren, the children of this world—though they are held in check by none of those loving restraints whereby our Heavenly Father keeps back his faithful ones from pursuing the vanishing joys of earth, though they are often permitted to taste to the full the cup of worldly prosperity and to realize their fondest anticipations,

though they are spared the loving severity with which God often chastens the sons whom He receiveth—yet in spite of all can find no real rest for their souls : they are the very first to complain of the bitterness and unsatisfactoriness of life and all that it contains : they are the most ready to utter those cynical and despairing reflections upon the vanity of all things human, which display ingratitude to Almighty God for the many blessings with which He has surrounded us, without being the utterance of a heart which has found its real treasure elsewhere. They, too, have to endure the sufferings of this present time ; they, too, are liable to be weighed down by bodily and mental anguish ; they, too, are worried by the fretting cares of daily life. But all these things to them are so much pure loss, so much taken away from the calm and enjoyment of their life, with no sufficient alleviation in the present, no hope of certain redress in the future. Nay, they are but the faint earthly foreshadowings of those sufferings which await them (unless they repent) throughout eternity, the penalty of sin already asserting its rights over them, and eager to obtain an earnest of its never-ending wages. My brethren, if there should be even one among us this day who has the misery to be living out of a state of grace, and far from God, who in his sufferings is supported by no conscious leaning on the

Divine arm, is cheered by no prospect of future glory, let him suffer himself to be attracted by the confidence and the hopefulness which breathe in the Apostle's words ; let him seek the unspeakable happiness of those who suffer in God, and in the very sight of the heaven which so soon awaits them.

And those of you, my brethren, who have already learnt in all your sufferings here upon earth to look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory which shall be revealed, have need to renew your faith by taking in your heart and on your lips these words of one who speaks to you out of the abundance of his sorrows and his raptures. You, too, have need to weigh the light affliction which is but for a moment against the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The load of suffering, which oppresses you, is intolerable, only when you take your eyes away from the light which streams down from the Jerusalem which is above ; nay, in proportion as you reach forth to things which are before, you learn ever to rejoice in the tribulation, which does but unite you closer to your Lord. There are many motives which to the true Christian transform the sufferings of this present time into angels of light ; they conform us to the Passion of Jesus Christ ; they eat away the canker of sin, which is corrupting our souls ; they afford us

manifold opportunities for the acquisition and the practise of Christian graces; but surely that is no slight support under them, which is opened out to us in the text—they are the loving, but stern heralds which usher us into that Presence, where there is fulness of joy for evermore. They are but the vanishing, transitory accompaniments of our probation-season, unworthy even to be compared with that to which they lead. May this thought be a source of strength to you and to me the next time that in God's providence we enter into some one of the graver sorrows of life; however grievous the trial, it is less than nothing when viewed in the light of eternity. And in the meantime, if for the present our path be easy, and our sky clear—let us be severely practical with ourselves in applying the Apostle's words to our daily life. Alas! it is easy to work ourselves into a glow of enthusiasm about the joys of heaven, and yet to murmur at the first passing pain of body we experience, to fret at the first little inconvenience which disturbs the trifling arrangements of the hour. If even the severest trials of our pilgrimage ought not seriously to disturb the Christian whose heart is settled on eternity, how much less the little worries which disappear almost the moment they arise!

My brethren, in a few years time, what will our present sufferings (severe as they may seem at the

time) be to any one of us, save in so far as they have brought us nearer to, or led us further from, "*the glory which shall be revealed?*"

" Brief life is here our portion,
Brief sorrow, short-lived care,
The life that knows no ending,
The tearless life is *there.*"

SERMON XVI.

THE BLESSING OF A HOLY CHILDHOOD.

(SCHOOL SERVICE.)

1 SAM. XII. 1, 2.

"And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you : and I am old and greyheaded : and, behold, my sons are with you : and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day."

WE are now reading, in the Sunday lessons of the Church, part of the life of Samuel. Last Sunday morning, you may remember, we heard how Hannah his mother poured forth a song of thanksgiving for his birth—how, according to the vow she had made when she prayed for his birth, she left him in the House of the Lord at Shiloh, and returned to her own home. It is a very beautiful history, that of the young Samuel brought up in God's own House. What a great blessing for him was it to be allowed to minister before the Lord, girded with a linen ephod, to pass year after year in the sacred shelter of God's House, and to be employed in God's

service. His mother used to visit him once a year, when she came with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice, and brought with her a little coat; and how greatly she must have rejoiced to see her little son growing up in favour with the Lord, and also with men—to see him so good, and obedient, and loving! Perhaps she felt a little sorrow that she could not have such a son at home with her, but then she would remember the vow by which she had given him to God, and she would know that in reality it was a much greater and nobler thing for Samuel thus to be devoted to God than to pass his days in his earthly father's house—for he was already like one in after time, greater than Samuel, “about” his heavenly “Father's business.” Samuel too, doubtless, rejoiced to see his mother, but he did not wish to return home with her, for he was happy and contented in his solemn duties, and he had learned to love the life to which he had been called. And so the years passed quietly on, until you remember one night there came to Samuel, while he was sleeping, that wonderful call from God—“Samuel, ‘Samuel.’” You remember how at first he thought it was Eli who was calling him, and ran twice to the old priest, and how Eli at last perceived that it was God who was calling Samuel, and told him, if the voice should come again, to answer—“Speak, ‘Lord, for Thy servant heareth,’ and then when

God called the third time, and Samuel made this answer, God told Samuel, child though he was, all the punishment that He was about to bring upon Eli's house. That was the first time God spoke to Samuel, but it was by no means the last. It was but the beginning of a number of revelations of God's will. God revealed Himself, it is said, to Samuel in Shiloh, by the word of the Lord—"and all Israel knew that Samuel was established to be "a prophet of the Lord"—that is, that God had made choice of Samuel to be an instrument of making known His own will to the people of Israel, of teaching them their duties, and warning them of their sins. After this, you know, Samuel was called away from the quiet of Shiloh into public life—he had to control and direct the Israelites—he became one of the "Judges" as they were called, and went round the Holy Land in his discharge of that office, and at last he had to yield to the wish of the people, and make Saul king over them, much against his own will. No doubt he had a difficult and anxious life—he must often have looked back with regret on those quiet years which he had spent in the tabernacle at Shiloh, with the old Eli; but throughout his long life he never forgot God, he always continued faithful to Him, and so you see he was able to appeal to the people themselves in proof of his integrity and upright conduct, in the words

which we have just heard in the lesson. The people themselves allowed, you see, that he was not to blame at all, that he had always behaved himself justly towards them, that he had not sought his own profit or gain. And when at last he died there was great sorrow for the loss of so good and great a man—"All the Israelites," we read, "were gathered together and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah."

And now what lessons are we to learn from this history of Samuel? You may perhaps think that you are living in times very different from those of Samuel, and that, therefore, his example has not much to do with you. But, indeed, I think that the life of Samuel is one which has very important lessons for us all, and especially for *children*. What a remarkable thing it was that God should actually speak to Samuel when he was only a child—that He should vouchsafe to make known to him at such an early age His divine purposes—that He should bring Him so near to Himself! You see He did not speak to the aged Eli, but to the youthful Samuel. And we may be quite sure that God would not have thus spoken to Samuel if he had not been pleased with his conduct, if he had not observed him to be pure, and loving, and truthful, and obedient. Samuel was a holy child, and therefore God loved him. And God loves children

now no less than He did then : He will watch, and protect, and bless each one of you if He sees that you are trying to love and serve Him. He will help you, and teach you His holy will, and guide you through your life, if only you will be obedient to Him. And how did Samuel please God ? We may be sure for one thing that Samuel never neglected to say his prayers, and when he was praying he always tried to think of what he was saying, and to remember that he was speaking to Almighty God. Then, too, Samuel was very obedient and dutiful to those who were placed over him ; we see how when he thought Eli was calling him in the middle of the night, he at once rose from his bed, and ran to him, and this not once only, but although he thought he had made a mistake the first time, he did not neglect to go when he heard the voice again. And so all children, who wish to resemble Samuel, ought to be very attentive to the wishes of their parents, and teachers, and very ready and active in carrying out their commands : they ought not to think it a trouble when they are told to do anything, and to make objections, but to rejoice at having an opportunity of pleasing those set over them, and of serving God.

But you will say, Samuel was such a highly-favoured child : he always lived in God's House, and was brought so near to holy things : he could

scarcely help being good. Alas! that is no sufficient reason for his goodness: for we sometimes find that persons who are brought into constant contact with holy things are no better, but rather worse, than other people, as for instance, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, who were priests of God, and yet were so wicked that God destroyed Eli's house on their account. But Samuel made a good use of the blessings and privileges by which he was surrounded, and so no doubt it was a great help to him to be constantly living in Shiloh. But are not you, too, surrounded by God's Presence? do you not go to school, and are there taught about God, and heaven? do you not come to church, and kneel down in God's Presence, and say prayers to him, and praise Him while the blessed angels are all around you, joining with you? do you not hear His holy Word? Nay, you are much more blessed than Samuel, for Samuel lived before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he could but look forward in faith, and believe that one day He would come; but you live at the time when He has already appeared on earth, you have heard over and over again how He was born a little child in Bethlehem, how He shed His precious Blood for you on Calvary; you have been brought to His Holy Baptism, and received the Holy Spirit in a far higher manner than even Samuel received Him;

one day you will, I hope, receive a fresh supply of that Holy Spirit in your Confirmation, and be admitted to receive your Saviour's Body and Blood in the Holy Communion. Christian children are, indeed, very near to God ; oh, how careful ought they to be not to commit any sin, when they remember that the eye of God is always on them, and the holy angels standing round them, and the Holy Spirit of God within their soul, and speaking to their conscience ! How anxious they ought to be to perform all their duties well, to pray to God constantly, and learn their lessons, and be cheerful and obedient at home ! Thus may they grow up like young Samuels before God, and when at last they go forth into the world, the God whom they have served in their youth will go with them, and guide them all through this life, until at last He takes them home to Himself in heaven.

SERMON XVII.

THE SENSE OF SIN IN THE SAVIOUR'S PRESENCE.

(FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.)

S. LUKE v. 8.

"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

SUCH was the exclamation of the great Apostle John beholding that wondrous miracle of the Draught of Fishes, by which he and the other disciples had been so over-abundantly supplied. Our Lord had been surrounded by eager crowds whilst He was teaching after His wont on the shores of the lake of Galilee; as the multitude thickened around Him, He cast His eye upon two ships drawn upon the shore, which had that morning returned from a weary, but fruitless, night of toil; the disappointed fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their empty nets. Into one of these, that belonging to Simon, He entered, and requested him to leave his employment, and to thrust out a little from the land. Simon obeyed, and our Lord, as on the

occasion when He delivered the Parable of the Sower, sat down in the boat, and addressed the multitudes who lined the shore. Of the matter of His teaching nothing is recorded, but we may be sure that the words sank deeply into the heart of the future Apostle. Then, graciously feeling for the disappointment under which Simon and his companions were suffering, the Lord turned to Simon, and bade him launch out into the deep, and, together with his fellow-fishermen, let down his nets for a draught. Simon doubts and expostulates for a moment, but his faith recovers itself almost at the same instant. "Master, we have toiled all "the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless "at Thy word I will let down the net." No sooner had they done this than the fishes of the sea obeyed the will of the Second Adam made to have dominion over the works of His Father's hands, and gathered themselves in shoals within the meshes of the net, which beneath the unaccustomed strain was now on the point of bursting, and releasing the captive draught. Speechless with astonishment they beckon to their partners, who had by this time embarked in the other boat, that they should come and help them in securing the prize.

But the laden vessels began to sink beneath the unwonted weight, and there seemed for a moment to be danger from that which had lately been so

ardently desired. The circumstances of the miracle sensibly affected the mind of S. Peter, and there seems to have flashed upon his mind some intuition of the truth that He, in whose presence they stood, was more than man—was in fact the representative, possibly the Incarnation, of God upon earth. In a kind of agonised terror he suddenly fell down at the feet of Jesus, exclaiming, “Depart from me, for ‘I am a sinful man, O Lord.’” This was not the first occasion on which S. Peter had seen our Divine Lord. Already in Judea he had been brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, and had received by anticipation the name of Peter. But this introduction led to no immediate consequences ; he seems to have returned to Galilee, and resumed his old occupation of a fisherman on the lake which washed the shores of Bethsaida—his native town. It was not, then, until this period that he received the call to leave all and follow Him, Who had not where to lay His head ; and this call was preceded by the miracle before us, and the heart-searching fear with which it inspired the mind of Simon Peter. Before, he seems to have regarded our Lord merely as a Jewish teacher of singular influence and beauty of character ; doubtless even then he was wonderfully drawn towards Him, round whom there must ever have hung an unearthly sweetness of power and attraction ; but

his love yet wanted that awful, yet unspeakably joyful, reverence which flows in upon the soul of one who grasps, though it be but in a passing glimpse, the ineffable mystery which encompasses the Person of the God-Man. But the miracle which had been enacted before his eyes, the words, the manner, the countenance of the Lord who stood by his side, raised to a certainty the vague suspicions which he may have already entertained; before, it had been "Master," now it is "Lord;" before, there had been hesitating doubt, succeeded by deference to a superior; now the whole soul is bowed in wonder beneath the manifested Presence of God: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

And such, my brethren, has ever been the effect of God's Presence felt and realised by a human soul. Even the sinless angels veil their faces, and worship with an awful reverence before the throne on high; how much less can man's nature, penetrated with the mystery of sin, endure without agony the blinding light and holiness of God! Thus Adam and his wife, in the first moments of self-conscious guilt, hid themselves among the trees of the garden from the Presence of the Lord God; the people of Israel trembled at the foot of Sinai, and intreated to hear the voice of God no more; Manoah fears death as the consequence of the vision of God; the blameless Daniel falls prostrate and weakened before the great

Angel of the Covenant ; Isaiah is oppressed with a painful sense of guilt after witnessing the adoration of the Eternal. And even when God Incarnate on earth had concealed beneath the tabernacle of our humanity the rays of His divine glory, and talked with man face to face, yet there were moments when the glory of the Divine Nature flashed forth from behind the thin veil of flesh, and confounded the awe-struck senses of the beholders. There were moments at which even His enemies were driven back, and fell before His Presence ; and many more occasions on which the hearts of Apostles and friends failed them for fear when they felt that God was, indeed, in the midst of them.

The Presence of the Creator once felt and realised can never fail to produce a profound effect upon the feelings and mind of the creature. It is impossible to treat Almighty God with simple indifference. It is true that the mass of mankind seem to be successful in doing this, but the true reason of this lies in the fact that the mass of mankind live virtually in complete forgetfulness of Almighty God, shutting Him out of their sight, and possessing no belief, which is worth the name, of His constant Presence about their path and about their bed. A blind man will pass along the edge of a precipice with a coolness which surpasses that of the steadiest nerve, and a man who has managed to banish from

his mind and conscience the thought of God will provoke Him to His face with an effrontery at which good men shudder, and angels veil their faces. He will recklessly sin throughout the day with the Eye of God fixed upon him, he will enter God's House, and mingle polluted thoughts with the words of prayer, he will in some extreme cases too terrible almost to contemplate make the closest approach to God which it is possible for the creature to make in this life—by receiving the Blessed Sacrament—yet all this with an indifference which can arise only from one source—a practical unbelief in God's Presence and Power.

But, my brethren, a realization of the Presence of Almighty God is not always the sign of a devout heart. The devils believe—they cannot choose but believe in the existence, the omnipotence of Him with whom their whole nature is nevertheless in the most irreconcilable antagonism. They believe, and tremble. They fear, but their fear is the fear of hate. Contact with the All Holy is to them the sharpest, sorest punishment. "What have we to do "with Thee?" "Art Thou come hither to torment "us before the time?" these were their cries in the days of our Lord's flesh. And are there not exceptional cases of human wickedness in which the despair and hate of hell seem to be anticipated on this side the grave, when God's Presence is not

simply forgotten, but (worse) is recognized and yet blasphemed, when it provokes not love, not reverence, but a wild feeling of repulsion, which vents itself in "talking against the Most High?" For such we can but pray that the infinite Love of God may yet recover them ere they be shut out for ever, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Distinct from both these attitudes of mind—from that which forgets God's Presence, and that which is awakened by it into hostility and fear—is the feeling of S. Peter as he prays the Lord to depart from the boat on the Galilæan lake. It is not unmixed with sensations of reverence and love. True it contains within it elements of terror; it is not the language of that perfect love which casteth out fear; it is lower than the awe which inspires angels and just men made perfect as they are conscious of the imperfections and limitations of creaturely existence in the Presence of the Great Alpha and Omega of all creation. But it is the cry of despairing love, not of despairing hate, of one who yearns after an unattainable height, not of one who is content to wallow in the mire of his sins.

It seems to spring out of several distinct feelings, each one of which we may see reproduced in ourselves at the present day.

And, first, undoubtedly it was the effect of fear produced by a sense of sin. The manifested Presence of the Lord called the Apostle's sin to remembrance : it produced a feeling akin to that of holy Job of old, "I have heard of Thee by the "hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth "Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in "dust and ashes." The consciousness of standing before a Being of infinite Holiness produces in sinful man a thrill of moral agony ; the force of contrast brings out into strong relief the hideous, the intolerable deformity of sin ; in the light of that Presence sin becomes exceeding sinful, and the yawning depths of iniquity which lie hid in man's nature are no longer veiled by the mists of custom and long habit. Man for the most part is unconscious of the real foulness of his sin ; the moral atmosphere around him is charged therewith ; he imbibes its taint at every breath ; the world around him is penetrated with it ; it enters into him at every pore, it suffuses itself more or less over his whole nature. Hence arises the further realization of sin which results from growth in holiness, the explanation of the seeming difficulty that the saintliest of mankind confess themselves the greatest of sinners. Men living at a distance from God are actually without any standard by which to measure their deflection from the Divine

Law : they compare themselves among themselves, they measure themselves by themselves, and hence a life which is steeped in worldliness and selfishness, penetrated with hard-heartedness or that covetousness which the Apostle pronounces to be idolatry, a life which in the judgment of Almighty God is condemned already, will often pass in the world for a fair exhibition of personal and social virtue. It is only when a man begins to ascend the hill of God, to make his way out of the foul miasma in the midst of which he has been living and moving, that he can in any measure discover the real proportions of things, or bring home to his heart the miserable and loathsome forms of evil by which he has been hitherto surrounded. And not even in the highest saints is this knowledge perfect : far removed as is their standard of thought and action from that of the world around them, so far removed that their lives are often accounted madness, and their end to be without honour—yet their knowledge of the real nature of sin falls as far below that possessed by Almighty God as does created holiness below the Source and Fountain of all sanctity. None of us probably could see sin as it really is and live. But, my brethren, we form some conception of it when we are for a moment lifted by special circumstances above it, when in the presence of superior holiness the disguises in which it is dressed

up fall off one by one, when our defiled nature stands out in fearful contrast with heavenly purity, our hardness and selfishness with self-forgetting charity, our earthly aims and wishes with the true end and object of life. We stand abashed before holiness even in our fellow-men, for it is the reflection of God's image upon their souls ; but when the Presence of God itself breaks in upon us, when, in lonely moments of deep conviction of sin, in great turning-points of life, in the presence of death and sorrow, in a sense of special nearness to the unseen world, we stand face to face with the All-Holy, self-condemnation rises almost to the point of torture : it wrings from us the exclamation : "Depart from "me : for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But, secondly, S. Peter's words seem to arise out of some feeling of repugnance between his human will and the will of an All-Holy God. It is in a less guilty shape the expression of that feeling which vents itself in the words of impiety, "Depart "from us : for we desire not the knowledge of Thy "ways." For there is, alas ! even in regenerate nature, a certain amount of antagonism towards the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. We can none of us be brought into the immediate Presence of God without being conscious of the claim which is made upon us thereby of striving after a more complete renunciation of our own lusts and

desires, a more entire conformity to that likeness, which we instinctively feel to be the Law and Pattern of redeemed humanity. The Holiness of the Creator is in itself a constraint upon the will and the ways of His creatures : it is in itself an all-sufficient motive to imitation. His Presence speaks aloud in our ear, “Be ye holy, for I am Holy.” And at this, man’s nature rebels : he has cherished anticipations and desires which he cannot consent to relinquish, he has contracted habits which he is unwilling to abandon, he shrinks from the toil and the effort which are involved in studying and transferring so far as may be to his own soul the lineaments of the Divine Image, he is keenly conscious of another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin—and thus awed and attracted by the beauty of holiness, yet dragged down by the burden of a sinful nature, and feeling his inability to rise to the height to which he is called, he cannot endure the silent reproach of God’s Presence ; he is blinded by its ineffable light : “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Lastly, we may take S. Peter’s words as the fitting expression of a quieted and more subdued feeling than either of those we have been considering ; they seem to spring also from a reverent

humility ; they seem to be only an intensified form of the Centurion's faithful saying, "Lord, I am "not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my "roof." He had been treating our Blessed Lord too much as a mere man ; he had been mingling familiarly in His company, listening to Him as a mere human teacher ; and now the consciousness lights up within him that "God was in that place, "and he knew it not"—that he had been standing at the very gate of heaven. It is surely the instinct of reverent souls to shrink back from sacred things, and especially when they feel that they have in former times been careless or over-familiar in the use of them. They feel it to be better to withdraw themselves altogether, than to run the risk of touching God's ark with unhallowed hands ; better to be deprived of that which they have not rightly valued, possibly have abused—better, for instance, to abstain from the Holy Sacrament altogether than to incur the danger of an unworthy Communion. It may have been in some such spirit as this that S. Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, conscious for the first time of the gulf which separated between him and his Master—"Depart from me, for I am a sinful "man, O Lord."

You, too, my brethren, in some one or other of the ways which we have now considered, may have had on your lips or in your heart those words of the

Apostle; wounded with a sense of your own exceeding sinfulness, or conscious of a will struggling against the Divine purpose concerning you, or penetrated with a feeling of your own unworthiness of the least of God's mercies, you also may have been ready to exclaim, "Depart from me, for I am "a sinful man, O Lord." Yet in that cry is the earnest of your acceptance, not of your rejection, they are the words of one from whom Jesus did not depart, whom He elected to be the chief of His Apostles, whom He employed to lay the foundation of His Church, whom He crowned with a glorious martyrdom. In this cry lies a sure augury of your future success; your sins, it may be, press on you as an intolerable load, yet better that you should feel the weight now, than, unconscious of it in this life, be weighed down for ever by it in the life to come; it is something, nay, much to feel that we are sinners, for it is the first step towards penitence, towards self-examination, confession, and God's absolving word.

Or, again, your will seems to want strength and energy sufficient to upbear you in the struggle against sin; you feel that you cannot rise to the height of God's requirements. Yet in that knowledge of your weakness lies your true strength; for it drives you if you are in earnest to Him, Whose strength is made perfect in our weak-

ness, Who worketh in us both to will and to do.

Or, lastly, sensible of your infirmities, and your past neglect or irreverence, you feel unworthy to approach the means of grace, to reach forth your hand to the Bread of Life. Such self-condemnation is, indeed, your surest title to acceptance, the most welcome offering to Him, Who loves above all else the sacrifice of a troubled spirit.

The voice of Jesus sounds in your ears as it did in that of the alarmed and conscience-stricken Apostle of old—"Fear not." He answers your broken-hearted cry, "Depart from me," not with a sentence of condemnation, but with a merciful and all-embracing invitation—"Come unto Me all ye that travail and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

SERMON XVIII.

FEARLESSNESS AND PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER.

(TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.)

DANIEL VI. 10.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house ; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

PERHAPS of all the characters brought before us in Holy Scripture, Joseph not excepted, there is none which excites in our minds a more peculiar love and sympathy than that of Daniel. Torn in early youth from the city which he loved so well, a stranger by the "waters of Babylon," the external splendour with which he was surrounded does but throw out into stronger relief the sadness and solitariness of his life of exile. In the midst of luxury he fasted: in the palaces of kings he was a stranger: among those who rejoiced he was mourning : he stands out from the pages of Holy Scripture as a character of unearthly holiness:

he is indeed a man of sorrows, but also "a man "greatly beloved :" he is occupied with the cares and occupations of a heathen capital, but he is visited by the archangel, Gabriel, and is made to behold wondrous visions which foretell the future history of the world.

And his example, my brethren, is one which comes home to us at the present day : it is an example which we may apply to our daily life. He was placed in circumstances which, though they are not exactly like our own, yet were not so different from them but that we may well take him as a pattern for ourselves. We are not, it is true, literally in captivity in Babylon, but we are in this world, which is a kind of Babylon to us ; and we are far away from our true country, heaven—the Jerusalem which is above. We are not, like Daniel, presidents of a kingdom, but we are each of us placed in some position of life with certain work given us to do, for the honest discharge of which we are responsible both to God and man. We are, if we are true Christians, surrounded by those who watch and observe narrowly our conduct, and who perhaps would not be sorry to find some occasion against us.

Let me remind you briefly of the previous history of Daniel. Daniel, you know, was one of those royal princes who were carried away from Jerusalem

by order of Nebuchadnezzar. At the very beginning of his captivity he had exhibited great faithfulness towards his God : he and his three companions—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—resolved that they would not defile themselves by eating the king's meat, or drinking his wine, and asked the prince of the eunuchs that they might live on pulse and water instead. And God was so pleased with this act of faith on their part that He caused them to look better and fatter on this less nourishing diet than those who accepted the king's wine and meat. Then soon after this you remember how Daniel had grown into favour with Nebuchadnezzar by interpreting his dream about the image—which the magicians and astrologers were utterly unable to do ; how the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon. In the time of Belshazzar—the son of Nebuchadnezzar—Daniel seems to have been utterly neglected until he was suddenly called on one night to interpret the meaning of the words which had been written by a Hand upon the wall in the midst of the great feast which Belshazzar was giving. He did interpret those words, and on that very night Babylon was taken by Darius, the Median. Under Darius Daniel was again promoted—placed in an exalted position, next to the king himself.

A foreigner, thus preferred above so many Babylonian princes, was naturally the object of much envy and dislike. He was jealously watched : all his actions were carefully observed. But Daniel, like a true servant of God, did not make his religion a protest for neglecting the duties of his earthly calling : he was diligent in his business, as well as constant in his prayers—and hence he teaches us that we must never attempt to put asunder what God has joined together, namely, a constant recollection of God's Presence and a pains-taking endeavour to do our work in life, whatever it is, heartily. And thus it was that the presidents and princes found no occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom, that is, concerning his discharge of his duties as president. So they became convinced, as they said, that they should find no occasion against him except they found it concerning the law of his God.

What followed we have just heard—how they prevailed on the king, Darius, to make a decree, that whoever asked any petition of any God or man for thirty days except of the king should be cast into the den of lions. Eastern kings were accustomed to be surrounded by hosts of flatterers—it was an impious decree, but it seemed to reflect glory and credit on the king, and so Darius consented and issued the decree, probably never

thinking about Daniel, or else imagining that he would readily follow the example of everyone else. And the decree once signed, not even the king himself could change it. And now mark what follows—"When Daniel knew that the writing was "signed, he went into his house; and his windows "being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he "kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and "prayed, and gave thanks before his God as he did "aforetime." He looked towards Jerusalem—for that was the city of his fathers, and there was the Temple of his God, and in his distant exile his heart was fondly yearning after the home of his childhood, and so in his prayers he turned his face towards the holy city, and "he kneeled upon his "knees." Yes, he made no secret of his prayers; he might have made excuses to his conscience, he might have said to himself, that during those thirty days it would be better for him to pray without the possibility of being observed, to pray whilst standing, or lying on his bed, and so at the same time, as it were, to serve God and mammon, to keep up his prayers secretly, and yet to avoid openly breaking the king's decree. But Daniel was too honest to make to himself any such false excuses; he was not ashamed to confess his God openly, and so he kneeled down, and that with opened windows, three times a day, thus imitating the conduct of

holy David, who said—"At evening, and at morn-
"ing, and at noonday will I pray, and that
"instantly." He prayed *and gave thanks* before
his God; he did not omit to join to his prayers
praises for mercies already received; and so S. Paul
has taught us Christians that we are in everything
by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* to
make our requests known unto God.

You see, then, that faithful as Daniel was to the king, and attentive as he was to his interests, there was a point at which his obedience stopped. In all worldly matters he was ready enough to give way, but once bid him dishonour his God, and he was instantly inflexible. The thought of the lion's den was terrible: but Daniel had learnt to fear One who could do more than kill the body, who could also cast the soul into hell. No love of worldly prosperity, no fear of human punishment could shake him—he continued to do as he had done aforetime, to pray and make supplication before his God.

And here, my brethren, you see the secret of Daniel's character—you see what lay at the root of all his diligence in the things of this world, of all his wonderful power of interpreting dreams, of all the revelations which were granted to him concerning things to come—Daniel was *a man of prayer*. Daniel knew what it was to draw near to God—day by day to live in His Presence—to

look up to Him—to seek His favour and protection—to make Him and not man the standard to which he referred all his thoughts, and words, and actions.

And this, my brethren, has ever been a mark of the saints of God in all ages. However much they have differed from one another in other respects—in age, in learning, in rank—they have all been alike in this respect—they have all been *men of prayer*. They have all looked up to God throughout the changes and chances of their life, and sought Him on every occasion. And if there is any true life in our soul we also shall live in the constant habit of prayer. You see what importance Daniel attached to this : he knew that the lion's den awaited him ; he knew that the penalty for his prayers was a terrible death ; but he could not be turned from his regular practice, he could not give up his devotions three times in the day : no, there was something that he feared far more than the hungry lions—and that was to disobey Almighty God. And shall we not, if we are wise, set the same value on prayer that he did ? shall we not be ready to suffer the loss of all things rather than give up prayer to Almighty God ? For consider what we do if we give up prayer : consider for a moment what prayer is. It is the link which connects us with

the next world—with the unseen yet ever-present God, in Whom we live, and move, and have our being. Once give up prayer, and you cut yourself off from God, you create a silence between your soul and God, you become a stranger to God, and God ceases to speak to you ; you become as one of the beasts of the earth : and what an awful thing it is to live on with this separation between your soul and God growing wider and wider every day—and how much more awful to lie on a death-bed, and feel unable from very strangeness to speak to God, or ask Him to have mercy upon you !

But if we are really in earnest about our prayers, we may be quite sure that the devil will raise up obstacles in our path—that he will endeavour to hinder us in one way or another. He tried, as we see, to frighten Daniel out of saying his prayers—to frighten him with the thought of the lions' den. And in this way he often succeeds against Christians—he tries to frighten them. Not, indeed, that we are in these days exposed to danger of our life for saying our prayers ; but there are various other ways in which people may be hindered from saying their prayers. Some of you may have heard the story of the brave little school-boy, who, on his first night at a great public school, knelt down by his bed-side amid the taunts and jeers of his

companions, and was not afraid to confess Christ openly. Now he rose superior to a temptation to which I am afraid a great many older Christians give way—I mean the temptation of being ashamed to say their prayers, or to let it be known that they do say their prayers. For alas! such is the guilt and corruption of men's hearts, and such hold does the devil obtain over them, that, not content with neglecting prayer themselves, they sometimes mock and ridicule those who do fear God. And I need not say that laughter and ridicule are most effective weapons, sometimes they answer their purpose better than open persecution, and a man will give up that for a jeer which he would not yield for a blow. Yes, so weak is man that he often fears the laughter of his fellow-man more than the displeasure of Almighty God—he is so cowardly that he often dares not do what in his conscience he feels to be right, simply because it would bring him into contempt with those around him. Ah! my brethren, is there any greater proof of the innate wickedness of the human heart than this—that men are ashamed to be religious—ashamed of that which ought to be their chief glory and joy?

For, brethren, when we come to think of it, why should any of us be ashamed of being religious, or of saying our prayers? Is it a shame to us to feel reverence before that great and awful Being, in

whose hands are we and all that belongs to us, to confess our exceeding sinfulness in His all-holy Presence, to seek His strength in our many needs and necessities ? is it a shame to us to kneel down before Him in Church, or in our private chamber, and tell Him all our wants and sorrows, to acknowledge Him as our true refuge and consolation, to seek His aid and protection ? No, verily, rather is it a shame to us to live without God in the world, to spend day after day without thinking of Him, without loving Him, from whom we receive all things for time and for eternity. Oh ! if I should be speaking to any who are tempted to give up or be negligent about prayer because of the laughter of ungodly companions, let me beg them to think of the unspeakably solemn words spoken by our Blessed Lord : “ Whosoever shall deny Me “ before men, him will I also deny before My “ Father which is in heaven.”

But there are other hindrances to prayer which the devil raises up against us.

Sometimes it will seem to people, (and they will themselves give this as an excuse,) that they have not *time* to pray—that their duties are so numerous and so pressing that they have no leisure, no time to themselves. Now this is almost certainly a false excuse ; it is true, perhaps, that according to their present way of living they have no time for prayer ;

but, then, it is entirely their own fault that they do not find or make time. If, for instance, people will not be at the trouble to rise early in the morning, they cannot wonder that they have to omit or hurry over their morning prayers ; if they do not arrange their work so that they may retire to rest in good time, they will, of course, find themselves too tired and sleepy to say their prayers at night. Our time, really, very much depends upon ourselves ; we may easily put off or idle over our work until we live in a continual effort to overtake it, and so really find that we are without time for other things. But will such an excuse avail with Almighty God ? Is the spirit of idleness and procrastination, which is in itself a fault, to be made a plea for a still greater fault—that of hurrying over our prayers to God ?

And even if it be the case that we are much occupied with necessary business—that do what we will, arrange our work as carefully as we can—we have very little time we can call our own, yet let us do our diligence gladly to give to God of that little ; and He who accepted the widow's mites will accept our short devotions, if they are all that we can honestly offer to Him.

But there are those who complain that they are much hindered by wandering and idle thoughts in prayer, and perhaps they are tempted to think that it would be better to leave off praying than

to go on in spite of the thoughts which trouble them in their devotions. Now, of course, wandering thoughts are a great hindrance to prayer; it is sad to have all kinds of unsuitable ideas come into our mind when we are kneeling in God's Presence—ideas which distract us from the words we are uttering, and make us feel that our prayer is well-nigh a mockery. But something may be done in this matter by a vigorous effort on our own part; a great deal lies in the power of the *will*; and if we really make up our minds to fight against these distracting thoughts, we shall be astonished to find how much better we succeed. Then we must also pray to God that He would help us to pray aright, that by the Holy Ghost He would give us the spirit of prayer and supplication. And if, after all, the troublesome thoughts still haunt us, we must persevere in spite of them, look upon them as a trial sent for our good, and not allow the devil to make them the means of tempting us to give up our prayers altogether.

But again, there are those who are tempted to give up prayer because they do not, as they say, find such comfort and enjoyment in prayer as they expect, perhaps not so much as they themselves experienced at some former period of their lives. They cannot attain a sense of God's Presence; they seem dull, and cold, and lifeless in their prayers.

Now this may be the effect of some sin or self-indulgence, and if so, the true remedy lies in greater strictness of life, and watchfulness over self ; but it may be also that it is a trial sent by God to test their faithfulness. Let them persevere ; let them not give up prayer because it does not yield them the enjoyment which they would desire ; let them remember that if we are to live acceptably to God we *must* pray—if we are to have any hope of heaven we *must* pray. We are not to pray because it pleases us, because we find comfort in prayer, but because God has commanded us to pray, because without prayer it is impossible to please Him. Let, then, this thought stir us up to greater heartiness in prayer, and even if we have to pray at times, amid gloom, and heaviness, and discouragement, let us remember that such prayers, if offered with a faithful and true heart, may be quite as much, or even more acceptable to God than prayers which are offered in great gladness and liberty of heart.

And, lastly, let us not be discouraged if God does not at once answer our prayers—if we ask, and for a time receive not. It is certain that God hears every prayer addressed to Him ; and if our heart is right in His sight, He will most certainly grant our petitions, that is, if what we pray for is good for us; and if not, it is, of course, a mercy to have it withheld : only let us be patient and wait, and we shall

see that our prayer has entered into His Presence, and has drawn down a blessing on us.

Pray, my brethren, pray continually ; you can scarcely go far wrong if you continue instant in prayer ; if you give up prayer you enter on the road which leads to destruction. Let nothing hinder you from your prayers—neither the fear of man, nor the suggestions of Satan, nor the weakness of your own heart, nor secret unbelief ; cling to prayer as a drowning man would to a rope ; pray when you are in joy, pray when you are in sorrow, pray when you have sinned, pray when you have conquered sin, pray in health, pray in sickness, pray in life, pray in the hour of death ; so will you find yourself carried safely over the waves of this troublesome world, and brought to that eternal haven of rest where you would be.

SERMON XIX.

FAITHFULNESS UNTO DEATH.

(S. JOHN BAPTIST.)

S. MATT. XIV. 10.

"And he sent and beheaded John in the prison."

TO-DAY, my brethren, August 29th, you will find marked in the calendar in your Prayer Book, as the day on which the Church celebrates the Beheading of the great Fore-runner of our Lord, S. John Baptist. It is not one of the greater Festivals—red-letter Festivals as they are called—and so there is no special service provided for it in the Prayer Book, as there is for such days as S. Bartholomew's, which we kept a few days ago, but still the mention of it in the calendar seems intended to turn our thoughts towards the event which it commemorates, and so it will not, I think, be unsuitable, if, by God's help, we meditate for a short time together upon the glorious martyrdom

which crowned the life of the great Saint of the Desert.

Among all the Saints of the Church, S. John Baptist stands alone. I do not mean to say that he was the greatest of all the Saints, or that he possessed any special graces which have not been exhibited in other Saints, but that, like the Blessed Virgin, he occupied a position entirely peculiar to himself, in the kingdom of grace. He is the subject of prophecy ages before his birth, the predestined herald of the Incarnate Word, the voice crying in the wilderness, of which Isaiah spake, the Messenger sent to prepare the way of the Lord, the second Elias, whom Malachi foretold. He was specially sanctified by the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. He was one of the Holy Family, and is represented in the sacred art of the Church as standing by the side of the Virgin Mother and her Infant Son ; even before his birth he leaped for joy on hearing the voice of the mother of his God ; he passed a lonely and ascetic youth in the desert, and then, prepared by long years of self-discipline and mortification, came forth endued with power to touch the hearts of sinners, and to lead them to their God ; his hands poured the baptismal wave on the head of the Incarnate Saviour, and consecrated Him for His Divine Mission ; he it is of whom our Lord Himself speaks in language

which He uses of none other, as he gains by Herod's hand the martyr's crown—a prophet, yea more than a prophet: and yet in spite of all this S. John Baptist seems to stand outside the glories of the Gospel Kingdom. He belongs to the Old Testament rather than to the New; he is the last of the Prophets, not one of the Apostles of the Lamb; and this explains our Lord's words concerning him, "that he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is "greater than he." Yes, so great and glorious a thing is it to be a Christian, a child of the Church, that the humblest among ourselves at the present day is, in one sense, raised to a higher dignity than even S. John Baptist, is brought into a closer union with his Saviour, is admitted to a nearer view of God's Presence. S. John baptized unto repentance; he was even permitted to pour water on our Saviour's head; but we have been baptized with the Holy Ghost. S. John saluted the Saviour in his mother's womb, but we in the Holy Communion receive our Saviour to dwell in our hearts. S. John prepared our Lord's way, but we have the continual Presence of the Lord in His Church. And so S. John, though in one sense so near to Jesus, is in another separated from Him. He is not one of the faithful twelve, who continued with Him during the temptations of His earthly life. He is far removed from our Lord's Person, he prepares His way, and

then retires into obscurity ; according to his own beautiful saying, he must decrease while the Saviour increases ; nay, he is not even permitted to obtain the special crown of Christian Martyrdom, for he lays down his life not in witness to the faith of the Gospel, like the Apostles, but only as one of the Prophets of old might have done, as a faithful preacher of righteousness, a rebuker of sin in high places. He lays it down, not supported by the example or the presence of other believers, amid the excitement of the arena, and in the gaze of the multitude, but far away from friendly faces and sympathizing hearts, in the lonely dungeon, beneath the stroke of a single executioner : and thus mortified, not only in the things of the body, but even in those of the spirit—cut off not only from the joys of earth, but even to a great extent from spiritual consolations, content to have nothing, to be nothing, to lose himself in the thought of Christ's glory, his only joy to be permitted to hear the Bridegroom's voice, and that but for a brief moment—he stands forth to us as the brightest pattern of self-renunciation and self-forgetfulness, an example which we may only remotely aim at, crowned with a special lustre of Divine grace, pure and spotless in his life, yet above all others, the Saint of penitence and self-denial.

Let us now dwell for a few moments on the special

circumstances attending his martyrdom. For some time past he had been kept in prison by the weak and wicked Herod. This was the result of his faithful reproof of Herod, for having married Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Herodias had long been anxious to put him to death, but hitherto her husband had resisted her entreaties ; he feared and reverenced the Baptist, "knowing that he was a "just man and a holy;" he would send for him from the dungeon, and in some respects obey his preaching. But at last an opportunity arrived for Herodias to satisfy her vengeance against the man who had denounced her sin. It was Herod's birthday, and he had made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee ; doubtless it was a splendid scene, the light shone brightly on the festive board, round which were gathered the noblest of the land ; the wine flowed freely, and mirth was at its highest ; in the midst of their rejoicing, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, entered the banqueting hall, and performed before the delighted spectators one of those curious dances for which the people of the east are yet celebrated ; the monarch, greatly pleased, swore to give her as her reward whatever she desired, were it the half of his kingdom ; she retired to consult her mother, and returned with a strange petition in the mouth of a maiden, "I will that thou give me, by and bye, in a charger,

"the head of John the Baptist." Herod, to do him justice, is exceeding sorry ; he had not expected this ; but he is flushed with wine, he is scrupulous, or pretends to be scrupulous, about his oath, he is ashamed to draw back in the presence of others ; and so he sends one of his body-guard to the dark dungeon beneath ; what passed there we know not ; the Baptist quickly learns the errand on which the executioner has come, and in a few seconds all is over, and the severed head is carried on a charger, a ghastly spectacle, into the midst of the assembled company ; it is given to Salome, and by her carried to her mother. The tongue of the faithful Baptist is for ever silenced on earth. But who shall tell of the joy and the peace into which his soul enters ? the sad, weary, tempest-tossed life is at length over ; the walls of the dungeon are exchanged for the brightness of the heavenly palace ; and while the revellers gaze in pity or derision on his bleeding head, he is ushered into the Presence of that God, who will be throughout eternity his exceeding great Reward.

And now, my brethren, what are the lessons which God would have us learn from this martyrdom of His faithful servant ?

First, that if we faithfully do our duty we must be prepared to suffer for it. S. John Baptist would have received many marks of favour and acts of

kindness from Herod, if only he would have held his tongue upon one subject : but he dared not be silent, and so he met with prison and death. We are not all, perhaps, called on to rebuke others like the Baptist, but we have all certain duties to perform, and a certain station in life which we are called to fill in God's good providence concerning us. The Apostle is not speaking only of the martyrs or early Christians when he tells us that " all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This remains true to the end of time. If we are really in earnest in serving God, Satan will be sure to stir up some opposition against us. Sometimes, it may be, our friends and relations will thwart and hinder us, or ungodly companions will put obstacles in our way, or we shall find ourselves placed in trying circumstances, with responsibilities to which we seem unequal, or we shall be harassed by doubts, or hindered by weak health. And these special hindrances of our vocation, whatever they may be, prove the test of our faithfulness. I do not mean to say that we shall always find ourselves thus sore let and hindered in running our race ; God is very good to us, and often allows His servants to serve Him, both in temporal and spiritual things, in joyfulness and perfect lightness of heart ; but to do our duty at such times as these is comparatively easy, and we must be prepared for

seasons when our work will become very near akin to suffering, when, unless we are prepared to forsake the narrow way, our feet must be wounded by the thorns which lie in our path.

And, secondly, let us learn by the loneliness of the Baptist's life and death, that God's grace is sufficient for His servants under all circumstances. He was, as we have seen, separated from Jesus in the body, yet nearer to Him in spirit than the multitude which thronged and pressed upon Him. What a lesson for those who are, by untoward circumstances, cut off to a great extent from the means of grace—for those who seem, if we may so speak, to be called on to leave God for God, to forego, for sufficient motives, even His holy consolations that they may be more perfectly conformed to His holy will. It is blessed to be constantly in God's House, to live in an atmosphere of Divine consolation, to receive constantly the Blessed Sacrament, but it is even more blessed to be content, though no fault of our own, as for example, through sickness, to be deprived of all this, and to repose our soul on nothing but the will of God.

And, lastly, let us learn to look on death not with horror but with joy. Herodias sought to wreak the most cruel vengeance on S. John; she did but release him from a weary imprisonment, and open the door to his eternal bliss. If only we are ready

for death, can death come too soon? It is sweet to praise and serve God on earth, but storms pass across our sky and the clouds return after rain; death alone can shut the door on sin and sorrow, death alone can secure us for the life everlasting. Only let us strive to live more entirely to the Lord's glory, to seek in all things not our own will but His, and when the summons at last reaches us, it will find us prepared to go forth into the unseen world—one short, sharp struggle, and then the great calm of eternity.

SERMON XX.

THE PROMISE OF OUR HEAVENLY CROWN.

(S. STEPHEN.)

REV. II. 10.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

THIS, my brethren, is part of the message of the great Head of the Church to the angel of the Church of Smyrna, and surely it forms no unfitting subject for our thoughts on this glad Festival, which immediately succeeds the great day of the Nativity.

Yesterday we knelt beside the cradle of the newborn Redeemer; to-day we keep in memory the first of that noble army of martyrs, who have borne witness even unto death to the truth and power of that Faith which was ushered into the world by our Saviour's Birth.

Rightly, indeed, is the blessed Stephen placed nearest to the Birth-day of his Lord, nearer even

than the beloved disciple, nearer than Bethlehem's infant band of unconscious martyrs ; for he was the first willingly to shed his blood for Him who suffered for all on Calvary—the first to win the martyr's crown, and to follow in the train of the martyr's King.

Brightly now shines the crown upon his forehead, that crown of life anticipated by his very name, *Stephen*, which in the original language signifies a crown such as was bestowed upon victors in the games. Well did he earn the fulfilment of the gracious promise of our text—applicable not only to the Bishop of Smyrna, but to all who labour and suffer for the Lord, through life to death.

Little is told us of S. Stephen in the Acts of the Apostles, but in that little what a world of brightness and happiness is contained ! Chosen into the newly-founded order of Deacons, he seems to have been already distinguished for his spiritual gifts and graces ; his name stands at the head of the list, and he is further described as “a man full of faith and “of the Holy Ghost;” a vast access of spiritual energy seems to have followed upon the foundation of the Diaconate ; the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and even among the priests—the priests who had hitherto seemed most hardened to the Gospel call—a great company were obedient unto the faith : and to this result the zeal

and devotion of S. Stephen seem to have contributed not a little; we read that “Stephen full of faith “and power did great wonders and miracles among “the people.”

Engaged in controversy with a synagogue of foreign Jews, he silences all by the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake; unable to vanquish him by argument, they drag him before the council or Sanhedrim, and set up false witnesses to accuse him, repeating against him the treatment which his Divine Lord had shortly before experienced; then the fire of Divine Love, which shone so brightly within, seemed to light up the countenance of the youthful deacon with an unearthly beauty, and even the stern and wrathful Jews beheld the face of the accused as it had been the face of an angel. Then followed that wonderful defence, a part of which you have just heard, a defence which only excited to greater wrath those to whom it was addressed. Meanwhile the faithful Stephen, surrounded by his savage foes, filled with God’s Holy Spirit, lifts his eyes earnestly to heaven—the home of all his affections—and there, by a marvellous dispensation of Divine favour, the veil which conceals the invisible world from the eye of sense, was to his vision drawn aside; beyond the starry height he beheld the visible manifestation of the Divine glory, and (joy of joys!) the human form of our Blessed Saviour,

standing on God's Right Hand, it may be with His eyes resting upon His faithful witness on earth, and encouraging him for the conflict which lay before him. His revelation of the vision to others is the signal for his destruction ; they rush on him with one accord, and thrust him out of the city ; and there, bruised and bleeding, with the stones showered upon him from every side, he breathes forth his pure soul with words of confidence and forgiving intercession upon his lips, and having thus quietly fallen asleep is carried reverently to his grave by loving hands, amid the loud lamentations of the infant Church.

Truly, a blessed end of a blessed life—a short agony, an eternal reward. In S. Stephen's brief history there is no record of faults or failures, no doubts, no fears ; all is faithfulness, devotedness, peace ; it is as though God intended that the Church should have nothing but admiration and love for her proto-martyr ; "faithful unto death" he gained at last "the crown of life."

And yet, my brethren, S. Stephen's was a very trying life—a life passed amid storm and conflict, in an eventful crisis of the Church's history—a life closed among foes, and by the hands of pitiless executioners. It was no easy matter for him to maintain his faithfulness, pure and unsullied, amid the temptations which threatened him from within

and without, no easy matter to cling to his God through all the changes and chances of his life. At any moment he might have given way, and made ship-wreck of his faith : and specially in those last trying scenes of his life was a strong pressure put upon his faithfulness. He had not even the example of the fortitude of other martyrs to nerve him for his dying agony ; he was required to stand at the head of them all, to be the first to scale the walls of the enemy. But throughout all he had respect unto the recompense of the reward ; the Lord stood above, holding out to him the crown of victory; and strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, he endured unto the end and was saved ; he received that crown of righteousness laid up by the Lord, the Righteous Judge, for all them who love His appearing.

And now, in applying the lessons of this devoted life and faithful death to ourselves, there are two points which our text suggests—first, faithfulness to death ; second, the crown of life, which is its reward.

“Be thou faithful unto death.” Yes, brethren, nothing less than that is required of us, if we would enter into our eternal reward. It is of no use to go half-way in religion ; nay, it is labour thrown away. What a miserable thought it is that there are some who set out on their journey to their heavenly city,

and encounter a good number of the hardships and difficulties of the road, and then, overcome by indolence, or frightened by some unexpected obstacle, turn back again into that broad road which leads to destruction ! Of what avail is it to them that they have resisted so often their natural inclinations, that they have been careful and regular in saying their prayers, that they have sought their Lord so frequently in the Blessed Sacrament, that they have borne, and had patience, and for His Name's sake have laboured, and not fainted ? Of what avail is all this, if they are now beginning to relax their efforts, to grow weary and faint in their minds, to turn longing looks towards the vanities and self-indulgences of the Egypt of this world which they have quitted, to account God's service a hard bondage, to walk by sight and not by faith ? Oh, what a solemn warning does our Lord give to souls in this condition, in the chapter from which my text is taken—" Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left *thy first love*. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works : or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." If any of you, my brethren, feel that these words come home to your heart, remember, I pray you, that you are in a very critical condition ; everything

depends upon your making an effort at once to shake off the spiritual lethargy which is stealing over you ; you are not in the condition of those who have never tried to love and serve God, who have never been awakened to a sense of the unspeakable importance of eternal things ; you have already, by His grace, set your faces heavenward, you have, it may be, experienced, though but in passing glimpses, that the Lord is gracious, and been permitted to taste of that peace which passeth all understanding ; you have perhaps already passed the most difficult and painful part of your journey ; this present temptation and heaviness, which alarms or dispirits you, may be but the crowning test of your faithfulness, the last barrier which shuts you out from that joy and peace in believing with which you long to be filled ; on your steadfastness at the present time may hang your eternal happiness ; one backward step now may prove your ruin ; it is the very crisis of your trial. Look back upon your past religious history ; reflect on the many dangers from which you have been delivered, the wonderful way in which God has led you on step by step until this hour, the grace whereby you have been enabled to maintain some degree of faithfulness ; and let the memory of the past encourage and cheer you for the future. Things may look black around you for the present : manifold are the troubles of the righteous,

and your peculiar difficulties may seem to you greater than you can possibly bear; yet if you cast away the service of your Lord, to whom will you go? What can any unfaithfulness on your part issue in but misery and despair? You cannot even enjoy the wretched pleasures of sin for a season with the same unconcern and freedom as those who have never known the way of righteousness. Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain? Will you allow all your past service to be thrown away, to serve no end, but rather to increase your condemnation? Cast not away then, brethren, your confidence which hath great recompence of reward. It is true that you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive His promise; but this patience, this endurance, this faithfulness, is God's own gift, and He will not be wanting to you, if only you trust in Him with all your heart, and with purpose of heart cleave unto Him.

Look then to yourselves, brethren, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward. After this storm by which you are now buffeted, there will be shed over your soul a heavenly calm, in which you will bless God for His upholding and strengthening grace, and thank Him with all your heart that you did not listen to the base suggestions of the Tempter, when

he whispered to you that it was in vain to serve God, and profitless to keep His ordinance. And if on some future occasion a similar trial of your faithfulness should threaten to overwhelm you, you will be in a manner fore-warned, and thus fore-armed—ready out of the treasures of your past experience to repel the darts of doubt and unbelief; your tribulation, according to that order so beautifully described by the Apostle, will have worked within you patience, your patience experience, your experience hope. And so you will be carried on, step by step, through all the cloud and sunshine of life, rejoicing in seasons of hope, patient in times of tribulation, at times marching forward with songs of triumph on your lips, at times faint yet pursuing, until almost before you are aware you will find that the end has come at last, that the conflict is all over, and eternity lies before you. “Be “thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a “crown of life.”

Of the greatness of that reward who can speak aright? Saints have been permitted at times, in their prayers or communions, to taste an earnest of their future bliss; dying men have, like S. Stephen, caught some of its glory reflected on their upturned faces; but the fulness of its reality is unknown to us all on this side heaven. Oh, who shall tell of the unutterable bliss which shall thrill

through all our regenerate nature, when the Lord Himself places the chaplet of victory on the faithful brow, and bids the weary combatant enter into the joy of his Lord ? What though he has laboured at humble tasks, and been immersed in the cares of unlovely occupations, or been surrounded by angry faces and lying words, or been bruised and crushed by the sharp stones of the world's adversities and torments, he has been looking up to heaven in the midst of all, he has by faith beheld the glory that shall be revealed, he has seen his Lord reaching forth to him the prize of his high calling, he has at last received the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.

Let us, my brethren, labour to enter into that rest. The way will at times appear dark and toilsome ; the world, the flesh, and the devil will bring to bear upon us all their manifold forms of temptation. Very various are the tests of our faithfulness to the Lord, as they succeed one another through the various stages of life ; to no two persons will they be exactly alike. Yet, let us press on our way through cloud and sunshine, through thorns and flowers ; the heavenly city lies at the end of our journey. At the very worst you know that the time is short, that three-score years and ten will bring you to the haven where you would be. Your faithfulness will be tried only until death. “ Until

“death;” it seems far off as we speak of it, thus securely in the midst, it may be, of health and strength; but it may be even at the door to any one of us, and come what may, it cannot be very long before each soul here assembled will be on the eve of being summoned into the immediate Presence of Almighty God. That much, at least, is certain amid all the uncertainties and changes of this mortal life. Oh! what would we then give to be able to look back upon a life of faithfulness to God, of faithfulness amid clouds and crosses, amid cares and disappointments, amid persecutions and vexations! how shall we then realize the truth that those difficulties and trials which met us on our way, and which seemed at the time so overwhelming, were but tests of our faithfulness, the fire and water through which we went before we were brought forth into a wealthy place!

And in the midst of all let us remember that our faithfulness to God depends upon His faithfulness to us. Only because He abideth faithful can we persevere in our heavenly road ; only because He holds us by our right hand can we be received with glory. The secret of S. Stephen’s strength lay in the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God, and uplifting His hands in intercession for His faithful servant on earth ; and so, too, our power in the conflict is not our own, but is infused into us

by Him, who, though He reigneth in heaven, is yet present with us on earth, in the way in which we go. Yet must we do our part in co-operating with the grace of God, we must strive, though not in our own strength, we must struggle, though the victory is of the Lord. This is the very mystery of our earthly probation, that our salvation must be worked out by ourselves, yet that it is God who worketh in us. The same Lord who urges us to be faithful gives what He commands, and bestows the faithfulness to which He calls us. And, brethren, the conflict is short, the reward is eternal ; the affliction is light, the glory unspeakable. How shall we wonder, if, of God's infinite mercy, we at length attain the crown, at our own weakness, and want of courage, in fainting so soon beneath the load of life ! how shall we reproach ourselves with our numerous unfaithfulnesses to Him, who is so faithful, so constant to us ! Let us then, to-day, renew our courage by the memory of the great proto-martyr of the Church, let us press forward with renewed earnestness on our way, with the thought of God's mercy in the past, and the hope of his blessing for the future. "Be thou faithful unto "death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

SERMON XXI.

DIVINE LOVE FOR THE SAINTS OF GOD.

(ALL SAINTS.)

PSALM XVI. 3.

"All my delight is upon the saints that are in the earth ; and upon such as excel in virtue."

TO-DAY, my brethren, the Church of God calls upon us to celebrate a glad solemnity—one of the chief feasts of the Christian Year. For if the memory of any one Saint of God is so precious that it lights up with holy gladness the day which is devoted to its consideration, what shall we say of this day's festival, on which we commemorate, not S. Peter, or S. Paul, or any single saint, however eminent, but the whole company of those who have “washed their robes, and made them white in the ‘Blood of the Lamb?’” Yes, on All Saints' Day our mind seems almost to sink beneath the great and holy thoughts which come crowding in upon it, when we think of that vast multitude which no man can number, of all ages, of all nations, of all ranks

of life, of all mental and bodily endowments, who, having come out of great tribulation, now rejoice in the Presence of Him, whom on earth their souls loved. There is the soul of righteous Abel, sprinkled with the blood of Christ, the first to pass out of the body, and make its way into the unseen world—there are the holy Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who looked and longed to see the day of the Redeemer, and died in the faith of that promise which they had not received—there is the much-tried and triumphant Joseph, advanced to a higher dignity than that of ruler over the land of Egypt—there is Moses, who has entered upon a Canaan, whose beauties far exceed those of the land which lay stretched beneath his feet as he stood on Pisgah—there is Joshua, who has entered into that better rest which remaineth for the people of God—there is David, whose harp is ever tuned to the praise of the heavenly King, and upon whose soul the waves of affliction no longer roll—there is Samuel in child-like innocence ever ready to listen to the voice of his Heavenly Father—there is the “goodly ‘fellowship of the Prophets,’ who, little by little, filled up the perfect outline of the glories and sufferings of the future Messiah, and were to those of their generation as a ‘light shining in a dark ‘place,’ until the rising of the Day-star—there is the sublime ascetic of the desert, S. John the Bap-

tist, whose herald voice called to repentance, and who pointed to the Physician of penitents—there is Mary, the pure Virgin, blessed of all generations, mother of Him who is both God and Man—there is the “glorious company of the Apostles,” the future judges of God’s Israel—the noble army of martyrs, with its old men and maidens, its young men and children—there are the great Doctors, and Fathers of the Church, who by their lives and writings manfully contended for the faith once delivered, and have handed it down to us of after ages—there are the bands of Confessors, who were not ashamed to acknowledge their Lord before men—there are the virgin souls who follow the Lord whithersoever He goeth—there, in short, are all those who by faith endured the toils and vexations of this brief life as seeing Him who is invisible—those whose names we know and honour, and those (how vast a number) whose memorial has perished from the earth, but lives for ever with the Most High—even from the soul of faithful Abel, to that soul which has, it may be, within the last few minutes passed out of the dull mists of sin and suffering into the light and sunshine of the Paradise of God.

Let us all, then, rejoice in the Lord, celebrating to-day a festival in honour of all the Saints, at whose victories the angels rejoice, and give praise to the Son of God. Yes, though the autumn be fast

passing into the cold and cheerless winter, though we tread under our feet the leaves which a few months ago waved fresh and green in the glories of the bright summer, though the darkness quickly closes in on the light of the ‘brief November day,’ the Church calls us to bask in the sunshine of spiritual gladness, to cheer our hearts with the thought of those who have entered into the beauty of that eternal spring on which decay shall have no power—who have risen above the mists and vapours of this lower earth, into the unclouded brilliance of the Divine light, where there is no night—who partake of the unchangeable nature of their God, and of whom it is written that they “shall go no more out.” The Church would have us, as it were, rise superior to the passing seasons and their influence ; these are but of time, and with time will pass away ; but the Kingdom on which she invites us to look to-day is a Kingdom which never shall be moved. She is not saddened by the associations of the natural year, she rejoices on the very threshold of the winter : for her delight is not in the perishing beauty of this world. No ; she seems to speak to us to-day, and take into her mouth the words of the Psalmist—she proclaims loudly in the ears of the world, visible and invisible, by her observance of this solemnity—“All my delight is upon the saints that are in the “earth, and upon such as excel in virtue.”

But is it the Church alone which utters in our ears these words to-day, as she calls us together to glorify God in His Saints, and to adore Him for the vast and varied fruits of Divine Grace upon the souls of sinful men? No. Do we not seem to hear that same Voice coming from her Heavenly Spouse Himself, as He reigns in heaven over all from the beginning? Does not the Lord Himself, as He looks down upon this lower world from His Throne of Glory, proclaim to us that His delight is in them that fear Him, and put their trust in His mercy? He sees indeed the fair beauty of the natural world, which He once pronounced very good, and which, stained with sin and strife though it be, has yet such surpassing power to enchain and entrance the heart of man; His all-seeing eye rests upon the lovely grandeur of the mountains, and the quiet loveliness of the valley, on the vast ocean with its far-stretching desert of waters, and on the rivers which run among the hills; but what are these to Him who has said, "Behold I create new heavens "and a new earth?" He looks down on the far-famed vaunted works of art and man's device—the massive pyramid, the towering cathedral, the spacious palace, the busy factory—but the King of the Heavenly Jerusalem has fairer prospects than these. He sees all that we value most highly, the strength of limb, the beauty of form, the accumulated stores

of learning and industry, the varied researches of intellect, the marvellous inventions of human skill and patience, and He who is the first Author of beauty and wisdom passes them by as unworthy of His serious regard.

But, my brethren, there is somewhat on earth which He sees, and values too—somewhat towards which His eyes and His ears are open continually—somewhat which attracts His regard, nay more, His deepest love. It is, my brethren, a soul created and redeemed by Himself, which under the warmth of His sanctifying grace is opening out in full flower before Him, and diffusing the odours of a growing submission to His Divine Will ; it is a soul which has learnt to wean itself from the vain allurements of earth, and has surrendered itself to the attractions of His grace—a soul which is yet sparkling with the dews of Baptism, or it may be washed from its stain by many tears, and the oft-repeated sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ. The Lord seeth not as man seeth ; that which is highly esteemed among men is often abomination in His sight, and that which man passes over with neglect or contempt is exceeding precious before Him. The Saints for the most part live a hidden life ; the world despises their aims, perhaps laughs at their frailties ; they pass away, and their names are forgotten, or live only in the memory of the

Church ; but the Lord, whose delight is in them that fear Him, and put their trust in His mercy, makes them the sum and centre of His care and love. For their sake He blesses the earthly surroundings in which they live and move ; for their sake He spares a guilty world ; with a view to their final perfection and happiness He orders and disposes all the workings of His Providence. He who scorns the pride of intellect and wealth and earthly greatness, rejoices in the work of His grace as it displays itself in the heroic lives and deeds of His elect ; their shortest prayer, their slightest act of self-denial, has its proper answer or reward from Him ; He gathers them, one by one, out of the ruined mass of humanity, to be jewels in His heavenly diadem ; He moulds and fashions their hearts, sometimes with the soft wind of heavenly consolation, and sometimes in the heated furnace of adversity ; He visits them with the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, He continually takes up His abode with them in the Holy Sacrament of His Love ; He prepares for them a place amid those that stand for ever by Him in the heavenly courts. Truly all else in the world is as nothing before Him ; all else exists but for the sake of His people ; they are the true inheritors of the earth ; all things are theirs, whether the world, or life, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs,

and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Yea, He is Himself their God and Lord ; He, the eternal, self-sufficing God, needeth not indeed any created nature to add to His essential, underived bliss ; He, though He were alone, and there were none else, contains within Himself all that is needful for His own perfection and happiness ; and yet out of His pure love He has drawn out of nothingness angels and men to worship Him, and in Him to find their rest and completeness ; and over those who thus answer to the end and object of their being, who live for Him that died for them, He condescends to rejoice with holy love ; He bears them ever engraven on the palms of His hands, He bends down from His Throne above with loving countenance, to support and sustain them as they struggle through the thorny paths of life ; He presents Himself to them as the one final and sufficient Object of their ceaseless adoration, when He has gathered them within the walls of the heavenly city. For (wonderful as it may sound in our ears) all His delight is upon the Saints that are in the earth, and upon such as excel in virtue. Oh, my brethren, what an overwhelming thought it is that the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is Holy, whose stainless perfection casts a shade of imperfection over the saintliest of His creatures, should so far humble

Himself as to delight in the souls of His people, and find satisfaction in their love! Ah! may we who are miserable sinners, and far from being Saints, venture to claim some place in His Divine Heart, some portion of His heavenly regard? Yes, if we truly seek Him; for He loves the feeblest of His servants, and calls His angels to rejoice with Him over the guiltiest of penitent souls.

But lastly, my brethren, can we take the words of the Psalmist on our lips, and proclaim on our own behalf on this glad day—"All *my* delight is "upon the saints that are in the earth, and upon "such as excel in virtue?" We seem, indeed, to do so by our meeting together here to-day, to thank God for the graces bestowed on His Saints, and the blessing of their examples; but how far are our words a reality to us? What, brethren, is our chief hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing, as we pass through the years of our earthly sojourn? Is it in something which is born of earth and with earth will pass away? or is it in the solid and abiding realities of Divine Redemption and Sanctification, that Redemption and Sanctification which is set before our eyes to-day, by such a countless host of living examples, who have washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb, and have been made living Temples of the Holy Ghost?

Ah! my brethren, that is the work, the Divine

Work, which alone will remain when the earth and all that is therein shall be burned up ; that unseen, that secret, that spiritual life, which the Saints of God live, is the only life which strikes its roots into eternity. The great empires, which influence the destinies of millions—the proud works of man, his power, his riches, his intellect, his fame—childhood, youth, old age, earthly hopes, and anxieties, and joys, and sorrows, and consolations, and at last the great material frame-work in which we live—all these pass away, never to rise again. You know it, you confess it, you see the process going on before your eyes, you look back upon the past, and count the autumns which have swept away the leaves and blossoms of your life. You say, perhaps, in the words of the poet,

“ What is it that will last ?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.”

My brethren, the Church to-day points you to something which *will* last—something which will out-wear the wreck and ruin of a perishing world—something which will survive the passing storms, and agitations, and excitements of a fleeting life—something which will remain when all else is stripped away, and the soul stands naked before the God who created it : it is a life hid with Christ

in God, a life crucified to the world, and in which Jesus, and Jesus only, reigns; a life such as that which, under so many different forms, and in many different outward settings, is described to us to-day—the life of the Saints of God, drawn from Him, who alone hath Life in Himself, and tending towards Him, unto whom, and in whom alone, all truly live.

THE END.



